

## Islamic theology of revelation read in terms of religious education: The scriptural prerequisites of a subject-centered and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics

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**Zusammenfassung:** Im aktuellen islamisch-religionspädagogischen Diskurs in Europa ist ein Prozess sichtbar, der über die traditionellen gelehrtenzentrierten sowie inhaltsorientierten Bildungskonzepte kritisch reflektiert. Hier wird eine religiöse Bildung und Erziehung angestrebt, die die Subjekte und ihre Lebenswelten ins Zentrum der religionspädagogisch-didaktischen Reflexion stellt. Dabei rückt die Frage in den Vordergrund, auf welchen hermeneutisch-theologischen Grundlagen eine adäquate subjekt- und kontextorientierte Korandidaktik begründet werden kann: Welcher Begriff von Offenbarung/Schrift könnte eine entsprechende Korandidaktik gewährleisten? Welcher hermeneutisch-exegetischer Zugang könnte eine wechselseitige dialogische Beziehung zwischen der Offenbarungsschrift und den gegenwärtigen Subjekten ermöglichen? Diese Fragestellungen bildeten den Gegenstand einer umfassenden Studie. In diesem Beitrag werden einige Ergebnisse dieser Studie vorgestellt. Dabei werden als erstes einige Spannungsfelder im Hinblick auf die Koranrezeption und damit zusammenhängend den jeweiligen hermeneutisch-exegetischen sowie den didaktischen Umgang mit dem Koran in subjekt- und kontextorientierten religiösen Bildungsprozessen aufgezeigt. Anschließend werden der instruktionistische und der kommunikative Offenbarungsbegriff sowie die historisch-kontextuelle Exegese vor dem Hintergrund des beschriebenen Paradigmenwechsels von der Inhaltsorientierung zur Subjekt- und Kontextsensibilität in (organisierten) Lehr- und Lernprozessen mit dem Koran aus religionspädagogischer Perspektive reflektiert und ihre Möglichkeiten und Grenzen für eine entsprechende Korandidaktik diskutiert. Ein Ausblick über die hermeneutisch-theologische Grundlegung einer zeitgemäßen Korandidaktik schließt den Beitrag ab.

**Schlagwörter:** Korandidaktik, Koranhermeneutik, Koranexegese, islamische Religionspädagogik, islamische Religionsdidaktik, subjektorientierte und kontextbezogene Religionspädagogik, Schriftdidaktik

**Abstract:** In the current Islamic religious education discourse in Europe, a process is visible that reflects critically on the traditional teacher-centered and content-oriented concepts of education. It focuses the subjects and their lives in religious education rather than the content itself. In consequence, the question is arising on which hermeneutical and theological foundations such a subject- and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics can be founded: Which concept of revelation/Scripture could ensure an adequate Qur'ānic didactics? Which hermeneutical-exegetical approach could make possible a dialogical relationship between the Scripture and the subjects? These questions were discussed in a comprehensive study. This article presents some of the study results. Firstly, some areas of tension with regard to the reception of the Qur'ān and, related to this, the respective hermeneutical-exegetical as well as the didactical handling of the Qur'ān in subject- and context-specific religious educational processes are pointed out. Subsequently, two currently relevant models of revelation/Scripture as well as the historical-contextual exegesis are reflected from an educational perspective against the background of the described paradigm shift in Islamic education and their possibilities and limitations for a corresponding Qur'ānic didactics are discussed. An outlook on the hermeneutical-theological foundation of a contemporary Qur'ānic didactics concludes the article.

**Keywords:** Qur'ānic didactics, Qur'ānic hermeneutics, Qur'ānic exegesis, Islamic Religious Education, Islamic Religious Didactics, learner centered and context-specific religious education, Didactics of Scripture

## I. Introduction

Holy Scriptures have very high relevance for believers: They have, among other things, a meaningful, life- and identity-giving function and provide orientation. They are also a spiritual source for believers and shape their worldview. Thus, in this function, the Qur'ān, along with the Sunna, is an important source of Islamic religious education.

The introduction of Islamic religious education in public schools in the Central European context<sup>1</sup> in the present encouraged the scientific discourse on the establishment of Islamic religious education studies. This discourse about the direction and future of Islamic religious education (see e. g. Behr, 2010b; Uçar, 2012; Polat & Tosun, 2012) raised new questions that also address the approach to and religious learning with the Qur'ān.

Thus, numerous Islamic religious pedagogues turn away from a content-based religious teaching and learning form according to the catechism concept and plead for an Islamic religious education that takes the subjects and their life worlds seriously. Therefore, what is strived for is a subject-oriented and context-specific Islamic religious education within the European context, as already shared by the neighbouring disciplines of Catholic and Protestant religious education.

This new orientation of Islamic religious education should enable a discursive, reflexive, but also lively and dialogical relationship between religious contents, the subjects and their lives, taking into account the demands and challenges of the religious and ideologically plural context. The (re)designing of Qur'ānic learning processes on the background of these religious pedagogical and didactic changes requires a different approach to the Qur'ān than the text-centered form that has been common up to now. This new fact brings with it new hermeneutical and theological questions or challenges that contemporary Islamic theology of Scripture and Qur'ānic exegesis must face.

In the following, a fragmentary insight into this comprehensive problem is given. The insight provided herein was researched within the framework of a study, some of whose results are presented.<sup>2</sup>

This article deals with the presentation and discussion of some areas of tension in the theology of revelation/Scripture, especially with regard to the reception of the Qur'ān and, linked to this, the hermeneutical and exegetical as well as didactic handling of the Qur'ān as a Scripture of revelation in organized religious education processes that pursue a certain concept of religious education, namely that of being subject- and context-specific.

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<sup>1</sup> In Germany, the first school experiments on Islamic religious education (IRE) were introduced in the 1990s and early 2000s (AIWG, 2020, p. 2). The initiative of an official and nationwide introduction of IRE in public schools came in 2008 through the decision of the German Islam Conference (DIK). In 2010, this decision was supported by the German Council of Science and Humanities, which at the same time recommended that the necessary training opportunities for teachers be established at universities for this purpose (AIWG, 2020, p. 2). Currently, different models of IRE (denominational or denominationally neutral Islamic studies, i. e. ger. *Islamkunde*) are being implemented in Germany in the form of school pilots, depending on the federal state, while some of them already offer IRE as a regular school subject. In the meantime, IRE teachers are being trained at about ten university locations (AIWG, 2020, p. 2). In Austria, denominational Islamic religious education has been offered in public schools since the 1982/83 school year. The recognition of Islam as a religion under public law enabled the gradual introduction of Islamic religious education in public schools across the country, organized by the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IGGÖ) (Khorchide, 2009, p. 8). The training of teachers has been carried out since 1998 by the private university, the Islamic Religious Pedagogical Academy (IRPA) (Aslan, 2013, p. 108), which since the 2016/2017 winter semester has been supported by the Institute of Islamic Religion at the Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems. In the meantime, IRE teachers are also trained at two other university locations in Austria.

<sup>2</sup> The considerations given in this article have already been dealt in detail within the framework of the study "Den Koran verstehen lernen. Perspektiven für die hermeneutisch-theologische Grundlegung einer subjektorientierten und kontextbezogenen Korandidaktik" (Çaviş, 2021).

## 2. Qur'ān as a multi-dimensional learning medium

In the general self-conception of the believing Muslims, the Qur'ān is regarded as written oral speech (arab. *qur'ān*) in Arabic language that was revealed by God to Muhammad (571–632) via archangel Gabriel. It represents the “direct speech of God” (arab. *kalām Allāh*). This understanding of the Qur'ān from the internal perspective as being “divine speech” lends it an essential importance as well as a normative function. It forms the foundation of Islamic faith and theology. In this function the Qur'ān is also considered as the central source of religious learning.

The Qur'ān as a medium of religious education is used in various practical educational fields in different forms of teaching and learning. For example, a memory-based study of the Qur'ānic verses in classical mosque-teaching is a common practice which is particularly important for Islamic liturgy. In mosque-teaching, much emphasis is placed on aesthetic learning with the Qur'ān. A common form of aesthetic learning with the Qur'ān, for example, would be a melodic lecture of “the speech of God” in its original language, in Arabic, by adhering to the rules of artful recitation (arab. *tağwīd*). The aesthetic peculiarity of the language of the Qur'ān or rather its eloquence provides such an approach. Likewise, calligraphy forms another form of aesthetic access to the Qur'ān, which is used in mosque or religious education classes in public schools as a Qur'ānic didactic method. Qur'ānic calligraphy focuses on the artistic representation of Qur'ānic verses.

However, in these classical forms of Qur'ānic learning, whose use in the teaching context is indisputable, the text “as subject” takes center stage. The recipients must acquire the text that is predetermined, given by teachers or experts. This puts them in a more passive role in the learning process (Çaviş, 2021, p. 2).

In addition to these text-centered forms of learning, learners' individual reflective approach to the Qur'ān is currently becoming increasingly important. This approach, based on understanding and reflection, also enables learners to approach the Qur'ān with topics stemming from their life contexts. Islamic religious education as an integral part of the general education in public schools offers such a possibility for children and adolescents, because learning with the Qur'ān is a main curricular component of religious education in German-speaking countries like Germany and Austria (Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2014, p. 28; Baden-Württemberg, 2003/2005, p. 51; Niedersachsen, 2010, p. 19–22; Hessen, o. J., p. 25; IGGÖ & IFZ, 2015, p. 19).<sup>3</sup>

This approach of discursive and reflective learning with the Qur'ān as a Scripture of revelation, raises new religious-pedagogical and also hermeneutic-theological questions, which have hardly been discussed in detail in the current debate of Qur'ān didactics (Çaviş, 2021, p. 2).

One reason for this is that Islamic religious education and religious didactics are still young scientific disciplines that are still in the profiling phase in the German-speaking context. The orientation of these disciplines will also determine the future profile of the Qur'ānic didactics. However, we know that in the meantime, valuable contributions are already being made in various Islamic theological and religious education centers at public universities, especially in Germany and Austria, that are guiding contemporary Islamic religious education, which has also provided important foundations for author's study.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the acquisition of competencies in the hermeneutical and exegetical approach to the Qur'ān, the historical-contextual reading of the Qur'ān, the ability to relate certain Qur'ānic verses to the individual lifeworld(s) of the students and, conversely, the interpretation of the verses based on their own life contexts, the sensitization to the plurality of interpretations in individual understanding and interpretation are among the essential educational goals in the curriculum of Islamic religious education in Baden-Württemberg (2016, p. 13, p. 17, p. 25; see also Bayern, 2006, p. 3; Niedersachsen, 2014, p. 6). It is noteworthy, however, that the current curricula do not (yet) reveal any distinct didactic-conceptual basis for orientation or any hint of it (Çaviş, 2021, p. 180).

Thus, as described above, many Islamic religious educators are currently distancing themselves from an exclusively content-oriented religious education and didactics and plead for a religious teaching and learning that takes the subjects and their lifeworlds seriously (e. g. Behr, 2010a, p. 131, p. 133–134; Khorchide, 2010, p. 146; Uçar, 2010, p. 45; Sahin, 2013; Çaviş, 2016). Consequently, a subject-oriented and context-specific pedagogy of religion requires a correspondingly oriented Qur'ānic didactics.<sup>4</sup>

However, Holy Scriptures, be it the Torah, the Bible, or the Qur'ān are “particularly complex teaching media” (Platow, 2011, p. 168) as the evangelical religious pedagogue Birte Platow rightly expresses. They demand a special kind of handling, because of the characteristic of the divine revelation attributed to them. They possess a certain authority and raise a claim to (universal) validity (Platow, 2011, p. 168).

The question that the author addressed in studying with regard to developments in Islamic religious education and the self-understanding of the Holy Scriptures is on which hermeneutical and theological foundations Qur'ānic didactics that takes the subjects and their life worlds seriously can be founded (Çaviş, 2021).

In this context, two questions arise in the first place that should be answered: 1) Which concept of Scripture and 2) which Qur'ānic exegetical approach could guarantee learner-centered and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics?

In the following, these questions shall be discussed in more detail. First to be addressed are, subject- and context-oriented religious education/didactics and its requirements for Qur'ānic didactics. This is followed by a description of the understanding of revelation and Scripture that is decisive for the respective handling of the Qur'ān in religious education processes. Two models in this regard will briefly be presented. Subsequently, hermeneutical and exegetical aspect with regard to the work with the Qur'ān will be dealt with in more detail and in this context, the contextual exegesis will briefly be outlined. In a final step, the findings from these two areas will be transferred to the field of Qur'ānic didactics, where a discussion on the basis of the key words subject and context orientation shall ensue, concluded by this author's brief outlook.

### **3. Islamic religious education: content orientation vs. subject-orientation and context-specificity**

A close look at the current discourse of Islamic religious education in the European context shows, as already mentioned above, that a subject-oriented and context-specific understanding of religious education is strived for.

Such an understanding of religious learning distances itself from the traditional way of imparting knowledge according to the content-oriented or catechetical concept (Altmeyer, 2011; see also Khorchide, 2010; Sarıkaya, 2017) and advocates a reflective and discursive learning process that takes the subjects and their concrete life worlds seriously (Altmeyer, 2011, p. 253; Khorchide, 2010, p. 146; Behr 2010a, p. 136). Subjects are perceived as active shapers of their own religious learning processes and their theological articulations are valued (Altmeyer, 2011, p. 248; see also Schweitzer, 2006, p. 156–157; Schambeck, 2005, p. 21; Hilger, Leimgruber & Ziebertz, 2015, p. 180).

This conception of religious learning has consequences for Qur'ānic teaching. If one takes the learner-orientation and context-specificity as a basis for the establishing of a corresponding Qur'ānic work, this

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<sup>4</sup> This approach stems from the image of human that underlies the emerging Islamic religious education in the European context, which it draws from the Islamic tradition. Thus, Muslim religious educators, join the current discourse, which has been carried so far by Catholic and Protestant religious educators. The disputes about the centrality of the subject and its concept in the discourse of religious education also show strong influences of the Enlightenment ideal of the subject. For more see Çaviş, 2021.

means that the religious learning process does not take place unilaterally from the text to the “address-ees”, but conversely, the learners also make demands on the revelatory text based on their respective faith and life experiences, to make it meaningful and significant for themselves in their respective life context.<sup>5</sup>

In this case, two levels meet each other: on the one hand, the requirements of a subject- and context-specific religious education, which places the subject and his or her lifeworld at the center of religious education and theological reflection. On the other hand, there is the respective understanding of Scripture that determines how the Qur’ān is dealt with in each case. The requirements of the holy Scriptures, which, because of the genuine quality attributed to them of being divine revelation, have a certain authority and claim to validity and require special handling (Çaviş, 2021, p. 68).

Thus, I return to my initial question: the essential question arises here, which concept of Scripture and which hermeneutical and exegetical approach should underlie a Qur’ānic didactic that could guarantee a reciprocal dialogical relationship between text and subject. This question is explored in more detail below.

#### 4. Understanding of the Scripture – between instruction and communication

If we consider the current Islamic theological discourse on the hermeneutics of the Qur’ān, we find above all two different paradigms with regard to the reception of the Qur’ān that shape the discourse. These can be roughly described as instructionist and communicative understanding of Scripture. While the instructionist approach to the Scripture focuses on the Qur’ānic content, the communicative reception of the Qur’ān considers the dialogical relationship between God and human, whereby the Qur’ān is received as a product of this historical communication process.

In the following, these two approaches to the Qur’ān shall briefly be touched upon and their consequences for Qur’ānic didactics described. Prior to that, the author should like to insert a small methodological remark. Let it be emphasized that here an evaluative comparison of both scriptural concepts, in the sense of negative or positive, or a playing off of them against each other is certainly not intended. In approaching this topic through study, both approaches are regarded as important efforts in the history of Islamic thought, which, in my view, represent the components of a higher-level discourse that is concerned with the search for truth. Rather, the author’s effort was simply a re-reading of the two Scrip-

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<sup>5</sup> A concrete example of the students’ life experiences exerting such an influence on their Qur’ān reading is, for example, the issues around gender equality. Among other things, students are socialised in a school environment, where gender equality is an important educational mandate of the school. This also significantly shapes the way of thinking and acting of many Muslims in the European context, although some of them are also familiar with contrary practices from their family and private social environments. These (new) social codes can influence their reading of the Qur’ān. For example, many young Muslim women cannot identify with Sura 4:34 and perceive the foreignness of the text in relation to their realities of life, which requires a corresponding hermeneutical exploitation. Conversely, the Qur’ān also offers numerous examples that can have an empowering effect on young Muslim women with regard to the question of gender equality. In this case, Sura 58:1–3, *al-Muğādila* (The Woman who disputes), can be mentioned, for example. This deals with a woman who disputes for her right, which is then granted to her by God through revelation. Similarly, the Qur’ān can have a corrective influence on the mixing of cultural practices and religion with regard to gender. For example, a female student was very perplexed and subsequently upset when she read Surah 65 as well as 4:130, where the Qur’ān provides for the right to divorce. She was agitated by the attitude in her family environment that does not grant divorce in the case of a marital union and reinforces this with the popular statement “the husband’s house entered with the bride’s dress is left only with the white shroud”, reproduced here in a figurative sense. This culturally influenced statement emphasises the married woman’s attachment to the husband’s family until her demise, which was critically reflected on by students using the Qur’ān.

tural concepts from a religious education perspective in order to be able to illuminate their potential for the establishment of a subject/learner- and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics (see also Çaviş, 2021, p. 25–26).

#### 4.1 Instructionalist concept of Scripture

The term “instructionist concept of Scripture” describes a particular manifestation of the traditional reception of the Qur'ān in postmodern Islamic theological discourse. This forms a designation that emerges from the criticism of certain aspects of this traditionalist conception of the Qur'ān by some contemporary Muslim thinkers.

This critique focuses mainly on three aspects. These are: historical decontextualization, universalization, and literal reception of the Qur'ān (Rahman, 1984; Abu Zaid, 1996; Wadud, 1999; Arkoun, 2003; Esack, 2002; Saeed, 2006; Özsoy, 2015; Van der Velden, 2011, p. 207). Specifically, an approach to the Qur'ān is discussed by the thinkers, receiving the Qur'ān as a predestined, supra-historical, written canon, which was dictated by God into the historical reality of mankind for instruction and exhortation. Accordingly, the Qur'ān contains normative truths that have universal validity, which is why the Qur'ān is to be understood literally. Human is thereby assigned the role of a passive recipient of divine revelation who submits to it unconditionally. Also similar to the approach that human was created for religion and not vice versa (Çaviş, 2021, p. 64).

This reception of the Qur'ān, which also shows parallels to the instructionist-theoretical Christian concept of revelation developed by the Catholic fundamental theologian Max Seckler (1985), finds expression in a similar way in the term “instructionist concept of Scripture” in the Islamic religious educational context.

There are divergent experiences of how this strongly text-centred approach to the Qur'ān has been and is being implemented in practice in history and the present: They range from actual literal implementation, as is the case with fundamentalist groups, for example, to conceptual reinterpretation of problematic passages in the Qur'ān, as is the case with some reformist currents. The author shall abstain from closer examination of wide-ranging theological background debates on this concept of Scripture here. What is certain, however, is that this theory of Scripture as described has consequences for Qur'ānic didactics (Çaviş, 2021, p. 81–82). Before discussing these, the communicative concept of Scripture ought to be briefly introduced.

#### 4.2 Communicative concept of Scripture

While the instructionist understanding of Scripture demands a supra-historical claim to validity and a literal reading of the Qur'ānic contents, the communicative concept of Scripture, which is currently represented by numerous Muslim theologians, assumes a historical-dialogical understanding of the Qur'ān. A well-known representative of this approach is the Egyptian Qur'ānic scholar Naşr Hāmīd Abū Zaid (1943–2010).

Abū Zaid's approach to Qur'ānic revelation is characterized, among other things, by the fact that not the Qur'ān as such, but the living relationship between God and human in the process of revelation is in the center. In other words, in the sense of the etymological meaning of communication (lat. *Communicare*) as “mediation”, “conversation”, his approach is primarily about “understanding”, “exchange” (all quotes from Brockhaus, 2019, online) or a process of interaction between God and human by means of revelation.

Thus, Abū Zaid understands the Qur'ān as a particular manifestation of God's word in history, which emerged in a living process of dialogue between God, the Messenger Muhammad and the first hearers

of the Arabian Peninsula of the 7th century in a period of about 23 years (Abū Zaid, 2008a, p. 130). The Qur'ān is considered to be the product of an originally oral, dialogical discourse, whereby the historical society of the time actively shaped the Qur'ānic revelation through its questions, interests and demands (Abū Zaid, 2008b, p. 118).

The historicity of the divine speech presupposes an examination of, among other things, the socio-cultural conditions of the period of revelation, the language, and the religious and world-view images of the first addressees/listeners, and relativizes the claim attributed to the Qur'ān to the universality of its literal meaning. However, the communicative-theoretical approach rejects an instructive-theoretical model of a literal transfer of the Qur'ān to present circumstances or contexts because these would not be expedient (see also Rahman, 1984; Wadud, 1999, p. 81; Saeed, 2006). On the other hand, it relies on a historical-hermeneutical and exegetical approach for the understanding of the Qur'ān (Abū Zaid, 2008c, p. 86).

This shall be discussed in more detail in the following. Before that, however, the possibilities and limitations of the two described concepts of Scripture for Qur'ānic didactics in organized teaching and learning processes shall be examined.

With a view to the two concepts of Scripture presented, overall, the respective understanding of Scripture, whether in the form of instruction or communication, is decisive for dealing with the Qur'ān and for determining the respective hermeneutical and exegetical approach. And depending on which approach is chosen, this is decisive for the practical subject-centered fields of education (Çavuş, 2021).

#### **4.3 Potentials and limitations for a subject-centered and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics**

If we first look at the instructionist concept of Scripture, it becomes apparent that a predestined, supra-historical concept of the Qur'ān, which provides for a literal reading, hardly considers the lived reality of the current recipients in the current socio-cultural context.

It does not ask in which life contexts the present recipients move, which questions, interests and needs they have, how the Qur'ān expresses itself in these local contexts and the global context as a whole, and how it can be made meaningful for the subjects in that context, as the subject- and context-orientation as an attitude requires it in its self-understanding. Thus, it offers little possibility for a dialogical relationship between the Scripture and the contemporary readers. Scripture serves as the sole basis for orientation and provides all the necessary knowledge. This approach promotes content-oriented teaching and learning and provides predestined identity concepts which the current “addressees” adopt as such. The demand of subject-oriented religious education that learners become subjects of their own learning processes can thus hardly be guaranteed.

If the communicative concept of Scripture is looked at from the perspective of religious education, what is noticed first and foremost is that a certain form of subject- and context-orientation is already inherent in it. Here, an image of the Qur'ān as the product of a living process of communication between the divine and the human is manifested. God perceives the historical first listeners of the revelation as dialogue partner or subjects and spoke to them in their language. He considers the horizon of understanding and experience of the first listeners and takes into account the prevailing cultural codes by revealing His message through a selected human being, namely through Muhammad, a historical personality who grew up in the language and culture of the first listeners.

God takes the individual and communal questions, needs, interests and concerns of the first listeners seriously, discusses with them, gives them orientation and instructions, and admonishes them. The first listeners thus act as active co-creators of the revelation process, – if one may describe it this way – they shape their own learning processes and co-determine the topics or the learning contents. However, this

communication process is not exclusively oriented to the subject and the given historical context, but God also provides content or topics for the subjects as guidance and orientation, for example, by correcting them or giving certain instructions and guidelines.<sup>6</sup> This continuous dialogical interaction between God and the first community is also reflected in the structure of the Qur'ān. God is not the only one to speak in the Qur'an. The Muslim community does as well, and even the opponents of the messenger have their say, with God acting as a listener (Abū Zaid, 2008d, p. 175–176; Abū Zaid, 2008e, p. 65; Çaviş, 2021, p. 133–134).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we can also speak here of a concrete reference to content. This form of subject and context orientation, which is inherent in the Qur'ānic revelation process, as well as the community and content reference, could form a possible basis of orientation for the subject and context-specific Qur'ānic work.

Furthermore, a communicative concept of Scripture, which situates the Qur'ān in the language and culture of a particular historical context, opens it up for exegetical and hermeneutical discussion. The possibility of exegetical access to the Qur'ān is considered an essential prerequisite for ensuring an ongoing, living, dialogical learning process for contemporary recipients with the Qur'ān (Çaviş, 2021, p. 120–122, p. 143–146).

## 5. Hermeneutical and exegetical approach

Thus, the next question comes into focus, namely, which exegetical approach would be suitable for subject- and context-oriented Qur'ānic didactics. In this framework, a closer look has been taken at contextual exegesis and its potential examined as a hermeneutical approach for a corresponding Qur'ānic didactics. This approach was chosen because the historical-contextual approach has long been accepted as a promising methodological approach for Qur'ānic didactics in Islamic religious education (Bayern, 2006, p. 3; Baden-Württemberg, 2016, p. 10; Niedersachsen, 2014, p. 6). However, it is known from the context of the biblical didactics that in the historical-critical approach, the text takes a central role in the learning process (Schambeck, 2009, p. 21–22; Baldermann, 1996; Berg, 2003). Therefore, this author wanted to examine the contextual exegesis and its potential for and correlation with subject-oriented Qur'ānic work in more detail. In presenting contextual exegesis, what has mainly been drawn on is the methodological approach of the religious philosopher Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) and the methodological approach of the Australian-Indonesian Qur'ānic scholar Abdullah Saeed (Çaviş, 2021, p. 147–176).

Like the communicative concept of Scripture, contextual exegesis assumes the historicity of the Qur'ān. It is aware of the historical distance between the time of revelation and the present and therefore rejects a literal understanding of the Qur'ān. For bridging this historical distance through hermeneutical effort, that is, for interpreting and understanding the Qur'ān in new contexts, it proposes a two-step methodological approach known as the “double movement” (Rahman, 1984, p. 141). This states that each Qur'ānic verse should as a first step be understood in its original meaning within the framework of its respective historical context of revelation. Only then, as a second step, can the intention (arab. *maqāṣid*) behind a Qur'ānic statement, be concisely the ethical principles derived from it, and not its literal sense, transferred to a present situation (Rahman, 1984, p. 5–7). Abdullah Saeed concretizes this approach in methodological terms (Saeed, 2006), which shall not be discussed in detail here, but rather, the possibilities and limitations for Qur'ānic didactics shall be moved on to.

### 5.1 Potentials and limitations for a subject-centered and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics

With reference to the analysis, the thesis can be put forward that contextual exegesis, in the form described, has subject- and context-specific features in its basic methodological stance. For it does not focus

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Qur'ān 2:189; 2:215; 2:255; 7:28–33; 8:1; 16:38; 58:1–3.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Qur'ān 1:1–7; 8:31–32.



exclusively on the meaning of the Qur'ān for the historical first hearers, but it also takes the current recipients into the center of its hermeneutical-theological consideration. However, there are also some problematic fields: For, as the description suggests, contextual exegesis in its methodological conception requires, among other things, a strongly 'scholar-centered' approach in the process of interpreting and understanding the Qur'ānic text. Its complex methodological orientation allows only indirect access to the Qur'ān for non-specialist learners, namely through the 'subjective' interpretation experiences of the specialist interpreters. There is hardly any room left for an individual, independent examination of the text of revelation by the learners, based on their own experience of faith and life. On the other hand, the subject-orientation also means that the subjective efforts of interpretation of the learners in the process of understanding the Scriptures are taken seriously or are also acknowledged. Thus, if contextual exegesis should serve as a hermeneutic approach for subject-oriented and context-sensitive Qur'ānic didactics, a re-reflection of the approach would be significant in light of certain religious didactic viewpoints.

As these remarks as a whole show, a hermeneutical and exegetical method is needed that takes seriously both the meaning of the subject and the hermeneutical presuppositions of Scripture. To accomplish this is a great challenge for contemporary Qur'ānic exegesis and Qur'ānic didactics (Çaviş, 2021, p. 174–176).

## **6. Outlook: Some perspectives for a contemporary Qur'ānic didactics**

For contemporary Qur'ānic didactics, it can be stated as a fundamental perspective that in organized religious teaching and learning processes with the Qur'ān it should take into account the learner as well as the teacher as subjects, their life world(s), i. e. the context, but also the subject community and of course the text. In order to guarantee a lively, dialogical-reflective Qur'ānic didactics, a balanced inter-connection of the aforementioned aspects would be indispensable in the planning and implementation. This approach presupposes that not only one particular element is exclusively in the center, but that all aspects are considered accordingly (Scharer, 2000, p. 59).

However, a specific concept of Scripture is needed to enable a subject- and context-specific Qur'ānic didactics. In this sense, a dialogical and relational understanding of Scripture, which receives the Qur'ān as a medium of a living dialogue and a living relationship between the divine and the human, would be essential. In addition, a historical-contextual understanding of Scripture, which always allows for new productions of meaning through interpretative engagement with the Qur'ān in new socio-cultural contexts, as well as promotes a meaningful opening of Scripture for current learners, is of importance. At the same time, a future-oriented Qur'ānic didactics requires an understanding of Scripture as an "open book/text" (Schlag, 2017; Nur Ichwan, 1999, p. 42), which, in view of the cultural, ideological and religious diversity in our society, enables pluralistic access to the Qur'ān. And thus, also provides access to the Qur'ān for non-Muslim learners – be it on a discursive level or on the level of dialogue promotion or general education.

With regard to the exegetical approach, one perspective that can be noted is that while the historical-contextual approach is important and significant in Qur'ānic didactics, it should show a willingness to cooperate more with reception-aesthetics perspective that deal more with learners' processes of understanding. For what is decisive for the didactics of Scripture is primarily, as the religious educator Bernd Schröder puts it, not the result of historical-contextual exegesis, but the construction processes of the learners, e. g. how they take up the text and adapt it to their respective situation in an appropriate and responsible form (Schröder, 2017, p. 226; Pichler, 2017, p. 133). Related to this, another field of research opens up that has been largely unexplored in Qur'ānic hermeneutics: Namely, the empirical study of learners' individual and communal comprehension processes in interpretive encounters with the Qur'ānic text. In this way, insights can be gained into the difficulties, limitations, and possibilities of reception and interpretation of the Qur'ān by non-expert readers. On the one hand, this could provide

content-related and methodological perspectives for Qur'ānic didactic practice. On the other hand, the research can also provide important impulses for theology and Qur'ānic exegesis and once again confirm that theological processes have their starting point in people's lives (Çaviş, 2021, p. 182–205).

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