
L'hospitalité divine: Towards a Responsive Christian-Muslim Theology

Norbert Hintersteiner and Richard Kimball

Zusammenfassung

Gastfreundschaft ist ein prominentes Thema in der Grundlegung interkultureller Theologie und interreligiöser Studien. Dieser Beitrag präsentiert Fadi Daou und Nayla Tabbaras' *Göttliche Gastfreundschaft. Der Andere – Christliche und muslimische Theologien im Dialog* (2017; französisch 2013). Er beginnt mit der Verortung des Textes in der Theologie der Religionen des Mittleren Ostens, gefolgt von einer Skizze der theologischen Grundlagen christlich-muslimischer interreligiöser Gastfreundschaft, welche die Kapitel des gemeinsam geschriebenen Bandes kennzeichnen. Schließlich wird vorgeschlagen, das Buch einerseits innerhalb der bis ins 9. Jahrhundert reichenden geschichtlichen Tradition interreligiöser Gastfreundschaft von muslimischen und christlichen Theologen und andererseits in den gegenwärtigen mehr theoretischen Debatten um die (Un)Übersetzbarkeit der Religionen zu verorten.

Schlüsselbegriffe

- Gastfreundschaft
- Offenbarung
- Islamische Theologie
- Interreligiöse Studien
- Interkulturelle Theologie
- Muslimisch-Christliche Beziehungen
- Theologie der Religionen

Abstract

The theme of hospitality is prominent in the foundations of intercultural theology and interreligious studies. This essay presents Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbaras' book, *L'hospitalité divine: L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane* (2013; German 2017). It starts by situating the text in the theology of religions of the Middle East. Following this there is an outline of the theological foundations of Christian-Muslim interreligious hospitality which inform the chapters of the jointly written volume. Finally, the suggestion is made to place the book, on the one hand, within the historical legacy of interreligious hospitality between Muslim and Christian theologians which dates back to the 9th century, and, on the other hand, in the current more theoretical debates around the (un)translatability of religions.

Keywords

- Hospitality
- Revelation
- Islamic theology
- Interreligious studies
- Intercultural theology
- Muslim-Christian relations
- Theology of religions

Sumario

La hospitalidad es un tema prominente en la fundamentación de la teología intercultural y los estudios interreligiosos. El artículo presenta el libro de Fadi Daou y Nayla Tabbaras' *Göttliche Gastfreundschaft. Der Andere – Christliche und muslimische Theologien im Dialog* (2017; en francés 2013). Comienza con la contextualización del texto en la teología de las religiones del Medio Oriente, y continúa con un esbozo de los fundamentos teológicos de la hospitalidad interreligiosa islamo-cristiana, que caracterizan los capítulos del libro aquí presentado. Finalmente, se propone contextualizar el libro por una parte dentro de la tradición histórica de hospitalidad interreligiosa entre teólogos musulmanes y cristianos que llega hasta el siglo IX, y por otra parte en los debates contemporáneos, más bien teóricos, sobre la posibilidad de traducción y de no-traducción de las religiones.

Palabras clave

- Hospitalidad
- Revelación
- Teología islámica
- Estudios interreligiosos
- Teología intercultural
- Relaciones islamo-cristianas
- Teología de las religiones

The theme of hospitality has been prominent for a number of years now, in the pursuits of figuring foundations in intercultural theology and interreligious studies.¹ Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara's *L'hospitalité divine: L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane*² is another distinct example of this, arising from a Middle Eastern context of Muslim-Christian engagement and coexistence. It is the fruit of their long interreligious friendship and professional collaboration at the University of St. Joseph in Beirut and later at the joint Christian-Muslim initiative of the Adyan Foundation,³ seeking to be hospitable and responsive to both, the other's religious and theological stances and life concerns as relevant to Muslim and Christian communities in Lebanon and beyond. According to Jean-Marc Aveline's preface to the book, *L'hospitalité Divine* offers a new approach to interfaith dialogue, giving way to the undertaking of »*théologies en dialogue*« in response to the ever growing challenges of religious and cultural plurality. With *théologies en dialogue*, Daou and Tabbara, a Maronite priest and a Sunni Islamic scholar promote »*la communion spirituelle*« between believers of different religions and faithfully translate theological questions into terms of everyday interreligious coexistence.⁴ The strength of this approach is that it does not rely on apologetic or polemic confrontation. Rather *théologies en dialogue* encourages a growing understanding and appreciation of the religious other through self-examination, as on a long shared journey. This approach promotes the idea that the religious other, without reduction or syncretism of beliefs, is genuinely part of God's plan and that »*la foi est plus un cheminement qu'une identité*.«⁵ *L'hospitalité divine* offers a welcome spiritual reflection on the encounter between two believers and theologians of different religious traditions who respect and care for each other in a responsive way.⁶

1 Locating *L'hospitalité divine* in Middle Eastern Theology of Religions

To clarify upfront the co-authored book's place in context of Christian theologies of religions discussions, in their attempt to find common theological grounds between Christianity and Islam, it has been common for Christian theologians in the Middle East to set Islam

1 See for example: Claudio MONGE, *Dieu hôte: recherche historique et théologique sur les rituels de l'hospitalité*, Bucharest 2008; Mari-
anne MOYAERT, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*, Amsterdam/New York 2011; *Hospitality – a Paradigm of Interreligious and Intercultural Encounter*, ed. by Friedrich REITERER/Chibueze C. UDEANI/Klaus ZAPOTOCZKY, Amsterdam/New York 2012.

2 Fadi DAOU/Nayla TABBARA, *L'hospitalité divine: L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane*, Zürich/Münster 2013. Originally composed in French and then translated to Arabic (by Adel Theodor Khoury): *Al-raḥābah al-ilāhiyah: lāhūt al-ākhar fī masīḥiyyah wal-islām*, Jūniyah, Lebanon: Al-maktabah al-būlusiyah 2011. German

translation: *Göttliche Gastfreundschaft. Der Andere – Christliche und muslimische Theologien im Dialog*. Übersetzt aus dem Französischen und mit einer Einführung von Uta André, Werner Kahl und Harald Suermann, Münster 2017. English translation: *Divine Hospitality: A Christian-Muslim Conversation*. Translated by Alan J. Amos, Geneva 2017.

3 For more information on Adyan, see: www.adyanvillage.net.

4 DAOU/TABBARA, *L'hospitalité Divine* (Anm. 2), 13–14.

5 Ibid. 14.19.

6 This essay goes back to a colloquium, titled »Göttliche Gastfreundschaft: Der Andere im Dialog von christlichen und islamischen Theologien«, with Fadi Daou at the University of Münster around his book on 29–30 May 2015. A joint doctoral students' event of theological units of mission studies and ecumenics at the universities of Münster, Hamburg and Rostock, together with the doctoral students scholarship programme of the *Missionwissenschaftliche Institut Aachen*. For a good German summary on Daou/Tabbara's *L'hospitalité divine*, the colloquium benefited from Harald SUERMANN's review at <http://christian-orient.eu/2013/02/19/> (6.4.2017).

somewhere within the general prospect of the Christian heritage, more precisely within the Abrahamic spectrum, emphasizing in different ways the shared features between the two religions. This has been the approach of most theological attempts for dialogue in the Middle East, especially in the past few decades. Daou places *L'hospitalité divine* within that context and amidst of the representative proposals of two renowned Lebanese Maronite scholars in this regard, Michel Hayek (d. 2005) and Youakim Moubarac (d. 1995).⁷ Indeed, the theological positions of these two authors are exemplary attempts, which through appreciating the religion of the Other – that is Islam – and even perceiving some revelatory elements with deep affinity with their own tradition, nevertheless conclude the necessity of the final salvific role of Jesus Christ, discerning the tradition of the Other as within the scope of Christianity and Christ as present in the religion of the Other.⁸

In a nutshell it is possible to say that Michel Hayek, in his attempt to make a place for Islam within Christianity, has perceived Ismail as the father of Islam and viewed Islam as a religion which has not entered the biblical history associated with Abraham, rather it is viewed as a universal religion, or a primitive religion, associated mainly with the universal covenants with Adam and Noah, but not within the promise of Isaac. However, he acknowledges Islamic criticisms of Christianity as valid, and remaining valid until Christianity becomes what it is intended to become, the Church of the Beatitudes.⁹ Youakim Moubarac, a student of Louis Massignon, on the other hand, has viewed Islam as part of the Abrahamic covenant, and consequently has considered Muslims, the *umma* of Ishmael, through the Qur'ān as among the people of God, who believe in the God of Abraham, and even who are associated with the people of the Bible. Hence, Islam is conceived as belonging to the same Abrahamic family, employing the image of a tree of salvation of which Islam is a branch. Yet like Hayek, Moubarac considers Islam not lacking the promise of Isaac overall, but an essential component of God's promise to Isaac, »... *pour ne pas laisser celle-ci dévaloriser en particularisme racial.*«¹⁰

Fadi Daou, himself also a Lebanese Maronite priest, in *L'hospitalité divine* follows a similar path. He maintains that there is an inner relationship that binds every human being to God, since God dwells in the heart of the human subject. Christians interpret this divine-human relation in Christian terms; yet, they cannot deny the reality of other ways of expressing this unity. The spiritual experience is universal, it belongs to all, whether Christians or non-Christians. Thus, according to Daou, salvation is not restricted to a particular group; rather it is possible for all. Daou refers to the claims of Hayek and Moubarac, concerning Christian-Muslim dialogue, and to some extent he adopts their positions being more in favor of Moubarac's argument, maintaining the revelatory nature of the Qur'an and the prophetic mission of Muhammad.¹¹ Daou actually seems to offer a compromise where Islam is not ›son‹ of the promise like Judaism and Christianity, but is ›son‹ of an alliance as described in Genesis 17:18–20. Islam affirms and revitalises the religion of Abraham as

7 Sylvie AVAKIAN, The turn to the Other: Reflections on contemporary Middle Eastern theological contributions to Christian-Muslim dialogue, in: *Theology Today* 72 (1/2015) 77–83.

8 Cf. Youakim MOUBARAC, *L'Islam*, Paris 1962; IDEM, *La Pensée Chrétienne et L'Islam, des origines jusqu'à la prise de Constantinople*, Paris 1969; IDEM, *Les Musulmans: consultation islamo-chrétienne*, Paris 1971; IDEM, *La Pensée Chrétienne et l'Islam*, Beirut 1986; Michel HAYEK, *Le mystère d'Ismaël*, Paris 1964; IDEM; *Al-masīḥ fil al-islām [Christ in Islam]*, Beirut 1961.

9 DAOU / TABBARA, *L'hospitalité Divine* (Ann. 2), 77–79.

10 Ibid. 80–81.

11 Ibid. 99.

12 Ibid. 81–82.

13 Ibid. 65–121.

14 Ibid. 104.

15 Ibid. 83–85.

16 Ibid. 24–29.

17 Ibid. 31.

18 Ibid. 34.

19 Ibid. 37–42.

well as brings its own revelation with the *Sunnah* of Muhammad, »... *n'est pas non plus un pur reflet de l'alliance Abrahamique*.«¹² Further, in most of these Middle Eastern attempts, including Daou's, the biblical notion of covenant is employed to support the argument concerning the common ground between Christianity and Islam.¹³ God's covenant is maintained to be universal, bringing about the notion of one holy history, which unfolds itself through the different covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham. Daou is aware that this brings with it challenges as to how it views the status and message of Jesus Christ as well as the fullness of his revelation, suggesting the covenant through Christ is viewed as the archetype which is to replace all other types of covenants of the Old Testament. Daou attests that the Christian cannot justify the place of Islam within the history of salvation unless in the light of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal Savior and the fulfillment of divine revelation to humanity.¹⁴ Fortunately these burning theological issues do not need to divide Muslims and Christians. Daou refers to *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 as an example of how Muslims and Christians can live together in spite of differences. In a spirit of Abrahamic fraternity Muslims and Christians should learn to appreciate the differences between the two faiths and carry out their »*théologies en dialogue*«. ¹⁵

While the adequacy of these contemporary Middle Eastern theological positions in their attempts for dialogue with Islam deserves more attention, here we only walk through the book and narrate the major topics of its various chapters. In that way we see how the authors' attempt of »*théologies en dialogue*« turns out concretely, offering a mutually responsive Christian-Muslim theology. Daou and Tabbara, together, they explore the teachings of their own religions on the nature of God's relationship to human beings and the manner in which God calls each person to respond to others. The authors are not naïve and do not cover over profound theological differences between the two religions.

2 Figuring theological foundations of Christian-Muslim interreligious hospitality

In his opening chapter, *Le Christ et les autres: l'union dans la différence*, Daou sets the foundation for viewing the faith of others, meaning non-Jews, as something that Christ acknowledged through the interactions with people of other faiths that he came into contact with, in spite of traditional Jewish misgivings. This is clearly demonstrated through contact with the Canaanite and Samaritan women and the Centurion.¹⁶ This is possible, Daou explains, because Christ places a greater value on spiritual experience than exterior practice. This aspect of faith became part of the early Church exemplified by the Apostle Peter in Acts 10:34-35. Yet Daou also recognizes that the Roman Catholic Church has not always been as inclusive to other religions, but rather insisted, »outside the Church, no salvation.«¹⁷ Thus for some Christians seeing faith as a journey to share with the religious other, may require a reappraisal of values. The challenge is to realize the inherent value of the other, in spite of religious differences. Daou makes the point, that the basis of dialogue with people of other faiths is the realization that we are all children of God.¹⁸ However, it is through Christ's sacrifice and the work of the Holy Spirit that all humanity benefits.¹⁹

In chapter two, *L'économie du Rappel*, Muslima theologian and co-author, Nayla Tabbara, introduces a discussion of the religious ›other‹ found in the Qur'ān. Here she notes that there are verses that encourage a spirit of tolerance and fraternity as well as verses that foster the need to keep separate and to subjugate the religious other. In order to avoid the

charge of contradiction, knowing the context of the verses, Tabbara reminds the reader, is of utmost importance.²⁰ Here she first expounds the Qur'ānic and Islamic understanding of the concept of the *People of the Book* in order to provide the theological foundation for embracing religious plurality. The use of the concept begins with her discussion of *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):135. Here there are Jews and Christians who implore people to join their religions in order to secure salvation. This comes in wake of the discussion of the pure religion *fitra*, the natural condition of monotheistic belief.²¹ Through the discussion of *fitra*, Tabbara points out differences between Islam and Christianity in relation to understanding human nature and salvation.²²

Another theme that is shared with Christianity regards God sending or guiding all people. Within the teachings of Islam this refers to messengers or those that warn society. This idea is emphasized with the concept of *dhikr*, that all communities have received God's message, as noted in several verses including *sūrat fatir* (35):24. Most importantly Tabbara comments that some of the messengers are more easily recognized than others. Thus the way is open for Muslims to keep an open mind as to who is sent to call people to believe in God and act justly, since the call to believe in God and act justly is for all people regardless of religion.²³ Tabbara defends this argument through examination of verses including *sūrat ar-rahman* 55:7-9; *sūrat al-maidah* (5):48; *sūrat luqman* 31:28 and *sūrat al-mutaffifin* (83):1-3. Here the onus is with humanity to strive in faith and good works through a response to God's natural calling. This calling is between man and God, in relation to other men, relation to oneself, the world, as well as the Day of Judgment.²⁴

Tabbara examines two ways in which Abraham responds to God. These are through *fitra*, and through revelation. In pre-Islamic times and throughout the Qur'ān the faith of Abraham is regarded as an example for mankind. In pre-Islamic times there were those who followed the pure faith of Abraham, they were the *hunafā*. Tabbara notes that in the Qur'ān both of the terms *islām* and *muslim* can be used as adjectives to refer to those who follow God in the broader sense.²⁵ This logic is then applied to *sūrat al-imran* (3):19, which states that the religion before God is *islām*. Tabbara challenges the medieval interpretation of the verse that refers to a reified *islām* rather than the state of faith of a believer. For Tabbara the *sense large*, of *islām* represents the way of all spiritual and religious experience, both for individuals and collectively, the way followed by all the prophets. They were all called Muslims since they placed their trust in God and submitted to Him.²⁶

In chapter three, *Alliances et révélations*, Daou discusses different types of alliances between God and man. To begin there is the alliance with Adam. Here God is like a parent. Man, on the other hand, refuses to take responsibility and brings disorder into the world. This alliance is followed with a renewed alliance with Noah, where even though man continues to disobey God, s/he still hopes for a new life for man.²⁷ With Hosea 2:20, Daou says that God's relationship with humanity is like a fiancée. The results of God's love for humanity are peace and reward in heaven for those who are faithful. Yet, the revelation of

20 Ibid. 43.

21 Ibid. 45-49.

22 Ibid. 48.

23 Ibid. 48-50, 52.

24 Ibid. 52-53.

25 Ibid. 56.

26 Ibid. 56-58.

27 Ibid. 63-64.

God is love for all humanity and knowledge of God. Through the alliance with Abraham the universal invitation to a relationship with God is expanded. In Genesis 12:2-3 God promises to bless all people on earth. Through the example of the faith of Abraham and his relationship with the religious other, for instance with Melchizedek, Daou demonstrates that God's grace is universal. God's alliance with Abraham is not therefore exclusive to other forms of grace in the world. God's love is for all people, that all people are »people of God.«²⁸ This love for others is exemplified by God's promise and relationship with Hagar and Ishmael. Here even though Hagar is cast away from Abraham's household, the Angel of God comforts her and announces God's plans for Ishmael.²⁹ Daou notes that God's love is not a code for an exam. The purpose of God's love is to bring believers and all humanity, closer to Him.³⁰

The common feature of these prophetic alliances is that they are external as well as internal with the emphasis on a personal relationship with God.³¹ Through Moses and the revelation of the Ten Commandments the People of God are required to uphold a moral standard as their part of the alliance. Daou notes that God's alliances are permanent.³² In addition Daou seeks to state through the example of Judaism that salvation in history is not linear. Salvation does not pass through one revelation to the next replacing the former.³³ This point is crucial to Daou's defence of the universality of the mission of Jesus as God's eternal word in contrast to the Islamic concept of abrogation.

In addition to recognizing that both Judaism and Christianity share a common heritage with the faith of Abraham, Daou acknowledges that Islam also follows the faith of Abraham and believes in the same God. This pronouncement is clear in Catholic teachings like *Lumen Gentium* 16.³⁴ For Daou Islam is the closest to the faith of Abraham, even closer than Judaism and Christianity. He believes that both Judaism and Christianity contain new revelations; they develop the faith of Abraham, whereas Islam heralds a return to the faith of Abraham. This return Daou sees in Hanafism. This is why in Islam Abraham represents the model of faith, while in Judaism and Christianity Abraham is the Father of Faith.³⁵ Daou asks what are the implications of Christians accepting Islam as the new branch on the Abrahamic tree of salvation? He recalls that the joy is accepting Muslims as fellow believers and finding God in their religion and life, with all the questions and perhaps not too many definitive answers.³⁶ Most importantly he states that the experience of solidarity accompanied with dialogue produces the best environment for interreligious dialogue as well as for reassessing our Christian faith.³⁷ However, as we have seen above regarding Middle Eastern theologies of religions, there are quite varying ideas of just how Islam fits into the Abrahamic spectrum.

In fact Daou posits that it is possible for Christians without complaisance or compromise of fundamental values to afford the Qur'ān as well as Muhammad a degree of recognition as divinely inspired. This follows from the Christian concept of Salvation History, where Islam is seen in the mystery of the light of Jesus as the universal saviour and in the fullness of the revelation of God for humanity. An important detail that Daou

28 Ibid. 67-68.

29 Ibid. 68.

30 Ibid. 59-62.

31 Ibid. 69.

32 Ibid. 69-72.

33 Ibid. 74.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid. 75.

36 Ibid. 76.

37 Ibid. 76-77.

wishes to assert is that this recognition challenges the Islamic idea that the Qur'ān in some way takes on a greater importance than Jesus due to chronology, or abrogation, since Daou argues the importance of Jesus is eschatological. In this view Muhammad's prophethood is within the alliance of Abraham. The status of the Qur'ān for Daou is limited. Daou does not regard the Qur'ān as the uncreated word of God, but the Qur'ān can function as a revelation, as *dhikr*, a reminder for Christians when it is consistent with the teachings of Abraham. By accepting even in a limited way the authenticity of Islam, Daou hopes Muslims will be encouraged to reciprocate by considering the Torah and Gospel as a sort of ancient Testament to the Qur'ān.³⁸ He hopes these gestures of goodwill inspire *théologies en dialogue* and move away from the theology of apologetics. Through *théologies en dialogue* Christians can accept the Qur'ān as a product of history, formed by its social and cultural context.³⁹

In this vein, in a later chapter, Tabbara indeed ventures that Muslims should consider the scriptures of the People of the Book as a form of *dhikr*. In support Tabbara cites a number of verses including *sūrat al-anbiyā'* (21):7, *sūrat yunis* (10):94 and *sūrat al-maidah* (5):44-47.⁴⁰ Where there are differences between the Qur'ān and the respective texts she hopes that these differences are considered matters of interpretation and not, *al-tahrif*, the alteration of scripture. Since, the Qur'ān sees itself as confirming the scriptures that came before it. Muslims should therefore study the scriptures of the People of the Book so that they can understand the Qur'ān better.⁴¹ Further Tabbara mentions that the Qur'ān notes that there are People of the Book who accept the revelation given to Muslims as well as their own revelation, *sūrat al-imran* (3):199.⁴² Ultimately the Qur'ān does not differentiate between *mu'minūn*; they are *Muslim* whether they are followers of Muhammad or People of the Book.⁴³

Back to the point of view of Christians, Daou maintains, through Jesus the fullness of God is known.⁴⁴ This is qualitative. Jesus is not the founder of a new religion, but the founder of the new alliance with all creation as described in 1 Corinthians 15:28 and Colossians 2:9. He is the Messiah, the new Adam. Through Jesus God speaks, not as a prophet but as the son who is heir to all things. For these reasons Christians do not accept that there is a new revelation that is greater. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of history.⁴⁵ However, citing the work of Jacques Dupuis, Daou makes the point that this does not prevent the self-revelation through other prophets and other religions. Without attempting to unravel the theological challenges presented by the seeming contradictory beliefs held by Islam and Christianity regarding the role of Jesus, Daou presents the prophethood of Muhammad in line with the universal gift of prophesy following Pentecost found in Acts 2:17.⁴⁶ Instead Daou shifts the focus to recognising the accomplishments of the prophets and the one through whom the prophets are fulfilled. Ultimately, in light of the universal mission of Christ, the role of the church is to help bridge the gap between other faiths.⁴⁷

In the fourth chapter, *L'islam et les autres religions*, Tabbara discusses the Christian religious other through the study of a number of Qur'ānic verses. Citing Aziz Esmail,

38 Ibid. 85-88.

39 Ibid. 88-89.

40 Ibid. 167-168.

41 Ibid. 168-170.

42 Ibid. 170.

43 Ibid. 171-172.

44 Ibid. 91.

45 Ibid. 89-90.

46 Ibid. 90-91.

47 Ibid. 91-97.

Tabbara examines the different phases of revelation as well as the context that contributes to the emerging Qur'ānic position regarding not only the People of the Book, but also polytheists.⁴⁸ Unlike most Qur'ānic scholars, Tabbara divides the phases of revelation into three, not two phases. These are the first Meccan phase, beginning with the first revelation; the Medinan phase following the migration of Muhammad and a third phase beginning with the triumphant return to Mecca, approximately three years before Muhammad's death in 632 C. E. Viewed in a thematic and chronological order, Tabbara presents an evolution of theological understanding of the religious other generally overlooked in Qur'ānic studies.⁴⁹

In the first Meccan phase, approximately 609-622 C.E., Islam faces persecution. Discussions concerning the People of the Book are characterised predominantly by Biblical narrative and reference to previous patriarchs and prophets. In Mecca religious diversity is initially frowned upon, as exemplified by *sūrat al-mu'minun* (23): 52-53. Towards the end of the period there is direct contact with religious others. This contact is characterised by a growing attitude of tolerance expressed in *sūrat al-ankabut* (29):46. In the second phase, the Medinan phase, there is growing security for the nascent Muslim community and the beginning of direct dialogue with living individuals and communities from among religious others. Throughout the ongoing development of the Muslim community there is a trajectory of acceptance of the merits of other faiths, especially those of the People of the Book. Tabbara notes in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62, faith and good works are upheld as meriting salvation.⁵⁰ An important feature of the period is the call to the People of the Book to join with Muhammad and his followers to form a single faith community. In this wider community Muslims and the People of the Book are required to believe in all the prophets and patriarchs, Jews must accept Jesus as the Messiah, and Christians must relinquish belief in Jesus as God's incarnation and son.⁵¹

Here Tabbara addresses the charge that some of the People of the Book have altered divine revelation as in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):75. She notes different interpretations of the verse championed by two highly respected scholars, Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari (d. circa 922 C.E.) and 'Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (d. circa 855 C.E.). Both scholars accept multiple understandings of the text and context. Yet Rabban al-Tabari makes the point that just as Christians discovered new meanings of ancient Jewish texts after experiencing Jesus, so too Muslims discovered new meanings in the Gospel in light of the prophethood of Muhammad. An important distinction is that Christians adopted the Jewish texts as their own while Muslims have thus far refrained from embracing the Torah and Gospel as theirs.⁵² Just as Daou noted above, the reason for this omission lies in part with the importance Muslims place on the chronology of the Qur'ān. However, in spite of the greater importance Muslims place on the Qur'ān and in spite of the failure of the historical Jews and Christians of the time from accepting Muhammad as a prophet, the Qur'ān continues to define the measure of faith in terms of belief in one God, belief in the Last Day and the importance of performing good works, not membership of a religious community *per se*.⁵³

48 Ibid. 102.

49 Ibid. 123.

50 Ibid. 104-106.

51 Ibid. 104.

52 Ibid. 107-108, 161.

53 Ibid. 109, 113, 123.

In fact following the meeting with the delegation of Christians from Najran, Muhammad, through the revelation of *sūrat al-imran* (3):64 invites People of the Book to compromise, and to a common word.⁵⁴

Tabbara notes that criticism of the People of the Book is constrained to personalities and never to the collective. In fact the Qur'ān never forgets that there are believers amongst the People of the Book and most importantly as collective they are never called *kufṛ*. Disagreements with the People of the Book generally can be divided into three categories concerning dogma, ethics and political contexts. Tabbara asserts that those who apply the term *kufṛ* to the People of the Book are tampering with the meaning of the Qur'ān.⁵⁵ Conversely, however, Tabbara laments that the failure of the historical People of the Book to join with the community of Muslims has largely contributed to the development of Islam as an autonomous religious community. Tabbara explains that even in *sūrat at-taubah* (9):29, that heralds the great cry of *jihad* against the People of the Book, the status of *dhimmi* and payment of the *jizya* tax, is historically questioned.⁵⁶

During the latter period of the Medinan phase, strong theological differences emerge between the People of the Book and Islam. *Sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 refutes the incarnation of Christ and the concept of the Trinity. *Sūrat al-Maidah* (5):116 refutes that Jesus ever demanded that people should pray to him or his mother. *Sūrat at-taubah* (9):30 accuses Christians of declaring Jesus the Son of God and the Jews of declaring that Uzayr is the Son of God. Two very interesting verses that Tabbara identifies from this period are *sūrat an-nisa* (4):156-159 and *sūrat al-imran* (3):55. Both these verses concern the crucifixion of Jesus. In *sūrat an-nisa* (4):156-159 the Jews are said to sully the reputation of Mary and boast that they killed Jesus. Tabbara focuses on verse 159 that says, »And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; And on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them.«⁵⁷ This verse she says is certainly one that could use greater interreligious exploration. *Sūrat al-imran* (3):55 concerns the crucifixion of Jesus and the issue of whether he died on the cross. The traditional debate centres around the meaning of *mutawaffika*, and whether or not the word in this context implies the death of Jesus. Tabbara seems to accept that Jesus may have died on the cross briefly. She states that the earliest exegetes allowed for this possibility. Further to the point she notes that the theory that Jesus was somehow switched or saved from death is not in the Qur'ān, but is a later exegetical concept.⁵⁸

Finally, the third phase of revelation concerns the return of the prophet to Mecca. Here during the last three years of the life of Muhammad Tabbara notes a distinctive change in the relationship with the People of the Book and other communities. Here there is even accommodation for polytheists, as in the time of Abraham, so long as there is mutual respect.⁵⁹ At this time the inclusive nature of Islam based on *fitra* once again comes to the fore. Tabbara makes the point that this nuanced change in the relationship with the religious other, following the return to Mecca, is a neglected area in most Islamic studies.⁶⁰

54 Ibid. 111.

55 Ibid. 113-115.

56 Ibid. 118-119.

57 Ibid. 122.

58 Ibid. 121-122.

59 Ibid. 124.

60 Ibid. 123.

For People of the Book interested in interfaith relations or religious diversity the third phase of revelation provides the context of some of the most heartening verses in the Qur'ān. Tabbara discusses several verses from *sūrat al-maidah*, as well as from *sūrat al-hujrat*, *sūrat al-hajj*, *sūrat al-imran* and *sūrat al-luqman*. These verses promote the idea that God calls all humanity to return to Him and to the way of submission, no one that devotes their life to God and performs good works need fear.⁶¹ Most importantly, religious diversity is portrayed as part of God's plan.⁶² This theme is expressed in many verses, including *sūrat al-hujrat* (49):13, where the Qur'ān employs the phrase, *O mankind!* And reminds all humanity of their common heritage through Adam and Eve. In addition *sūrat al-maidah* (5):64 refutes Jewish claims that God's hands are tied, that salvation blessings are reserved for them while stating that God's hands are open and He bestows blessings where He wills.⁶³

Two critical verses Tabbara cites are *sūrat al-maidah* (5):68-9. She states that Mahmoud Ayoub considers these verses the most important in the Qur'ān concerning other religions.⁶⁴ These verses challenge the People of the Book to follow the revelation given to them by their Lord. Here the Qur'ān clearly acknowledges the merit of the Torah, Gospel and other revelations as well as the necessity to put faith to practice. Of course there are differences between the faiths, these are noted and yet as with *sūrat al-maidah* (5):48, the differences should do no more than challenge people to strive to better serve God.⁶⁵ In the process of placing the finishing touches on their arguments for accepting the religious other as part of God's plan, Tabbara and Daou expand divine hospitality to include all people of conscience.

The fifth chapter titles *L'Église et les autres religions: vers la solidarité spirituelle*. Here, Daou outlines the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding other faiths and their potential for salvation. To begin his argument Daou cites one of the most inclusive, if not ethereal elements of *Nostra Aetate*. This is that the Catholic Church does not reject what is true and good in other religions. This statement is supported by two verses from the New Testament Mark 10:17-18 and John 14:6. The first simply states that Jesus challenged a person who called him good, saying that only the Father is good. Therefore all that is human is in need of God's guidance. In the second verse Jesus proclaims, »I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.«⁶⁶ This verse is often used to express the exclusivist expression of Christian faith. However, Daou uses the verse in an inclusivist manner to assert that the eternal word of God is not absent from other religions even if there are gaps and errors in their understanding of God.⁶⁷ Daou recognises that there is a difference between religion and faith. Religions may contain flaws, but a person's faith in God is separate. The fact that God accepts other religions is evidenced examples of the Centurion, the Canaanite and the Samaritan women, referred to above. It seems that the criteria for salvation is simple: other religions must be consistent with God's design for love and salvation.⁶⁸

Daou notes that other religions are a positive challenge for the church. It is necessary to recognise the spiritual experiences of others as religious virtues and that the Spirit of

61 Ibid. 124-133.

62 Ibid. 137.

63 Ibid. 126-127.

64 Ibid. 129.

65 Ibid. 131.

66 Ibid. 139.

67 Ibid. 139-140.

68 Ibid. 143.

God blows where it wills. John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* 56 states that other religions contain signs of the presence of Christ and the actions of the Spirit. The Qur'ān also contains examples of Christian devotion. In fact, if we keep open minds, Daou posits, it is possible to see that »the presence of the other is the voice of God in our life.«⁶⁹ Ultimately the question is, what is the purpose of the differences? Daou maintains that we need to allow other religions a role in our theology. This avoids two pitfalls. The first is that by learning of their spiritual experience we avoid locking the other religion into a question of whether or not the other has divine status i.e., does the other have a role in God's plan of salvation. The second reflects the need to appreciate the gifts that God bestows on other faiths. Understanding other faiths helps avoid naïve stereotypes. What is required is a theology that chooses to accompany the other through life.⁷⁰ It is interesting to consider, Daou reflects, that neither Jesus nor the Gospel ever called for people to ever change their religion. Rather the call is personally to follow God's way.⁷¹

For Daou one of the mysteries of salvation is when Christians can recognise the work of God in the religion of others without losing faith in their own religion and its role in God's universal design.⁷² He stresses that Christians today need to learn how to live with respect for religious diversity, that has its foundation with the love of God for mankind and respect for human freedom. The dialogue, Daou adds, is not just between the interlocutors but also with God present.⁷³ By engaging or living in solidarity with Muslims, Christians will find a spiritual solidarity that is based on witness. It is necessary for Muslims and Christians to take a step of faith beyond, perhaps a purely academic interest, to appreciate the religious other in communion, with all our differences, as on the day when we all stand before God.⁷⁴

In the sixth and final chapter, titled *Reconnaissance et Communion*, Tabbara advocates accepting the authenticity of the beliefs of the religious other, especially Christians and the People of the Book. However, as reflected in the words of Mahmoud Ayoub, history demonstrates that the lessons of the Gospel and the Qur'ān, that promote the universality of love and mercy, are too often transformed into narrow dogma to exclude others.⁷⁵ Interestingly, Tabbara makes the point that the idea that Islamic law abrogates the laws of the People of the Book has never received universal acceptance. Tabbara confirms that the promises made to the People of the Book, stand alongside the revelation of the Qur'ān.⁷⁶

Therefore if religious diversity and cultural pluralism are part of God's plan for salvation, what role is left for Islamic Mission, *da'wah*? Tabbara sees the role of Islam to call people to God in a similar manner as Daou. For support, Tabbara calls upon *sūrat fussilat* (41):33 that states, »Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, ›I am of those who bow in Islam.«⁷⁷ Most importantly, from the perspective of plurality, Tabbara asserts Muslims are not required to call people to convert to Islam per se, but to call people to God. A prime example for mankind is found in the life of Abraham explained in *sūrat al-mumtahinah* 60:4. Abraham faithfully follows God and separates from his father's community, but rather than live in enmity, says to his father that he will pray for him that he

69 Ibid. 143-144.

70 Ibid. 143-146.

71 Ibid. 154.

72 Ibid. 155-156.

73 Ibid. 156.

74 Ibid. 158-159.

75 Ibid. 161.

76 Ibid. 161-162.

77 Ibid. 161-165.

will be forgiven for his transgresses.⁷⁸ In addition there is the example of Muhammad and his community as expressed in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):143 to be a witness before all mankind. The Qur'ān teaches Muslims through other verses like *sūrat al-maidah* (5):48 to accept religious diversity as God's will and to allow God to be the final arbitrator concerning the issues that divide believers of different religions.⁷⁹ This point is made quite clear by the famous mystique Hallaj, who sees each religion as necessarily contributing to the whole of God's revelation.⁸⁰

For Daou and Tabbara *la communion spirituelle* is not just a dream. It is a way forward and away from the narrow vision of the religious other as a distant nonentity. In our increasingly intertwined world we need to reappraise how we view the religious other, how our worldview makes space for all peoples. Daou in his conclusions boldly declares that God is greater than the mission of Christ and his disciples. He says, quoting John 14:2 that in my Father's house there are many rooms. Perhaps there is a temptation to create a worldview that allows us to reduce God to what we can understand, who we perceive to be good and who is worthy of salvation. However, Divine Hospitality envisions a world where not only are there many rooms, but all are made to feel welcome. For Daou, where the believers are made mutually welcome, there is God.⁸¹

Similarly, Tabbara reminds the reader that one of the divine attributes of God is, *al-wasi*, the Vast. God is beyond limits in mercy and knowledge. Al Ghazali, on the subject of divine attributes, says that through faith believing Muslims can cultivate space internally for God and His attributes.⁸² Tabbara notes that this is not unrelated to Divine Hospitality. In this way the believing Muslim cultivates hospitality in his heart, a place for God where the vastness of God enlarges our capacity to know and love God. Tabbara cites a beautiful Hadith on this subject preserved by al-Qudsi that says, »Not my earth, nor my sky can contain me, only the heart of my adoring believer can contain me.«⁸³ Through this hospitality a space is made for love and knowledge of others. Tabbara ends by recalling the theme of *A Common Word*: love of God and love of neighbour. Through the Hospitality Divine, the other's fears, thoughts and comprehension of their relationship with the world and with the Divine becomes part of our spiritual being, in spite of and in respect of our differences. This Hospitality Divine within necessitates changes in our perspective, enlarges our compassion and comprehension, leaving behind the comforts of our own community to move towards and with the other, like Abraham.⁸⁴

3 The legacy of interreligious hospitality and (un)translatibility

While our brief walking through the chapters of the *L'hospitalité divine*, it has not been our intention to offer critical engagements on the various theological topoi and discussions touched by Daou and Tabbara. Such will happen as this book gets read more widely, critically by peers and by students in classrooms. By way of closing, however, two themes for further reflection shall be brought up.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 165.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 168.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 163.

⁸¹ Ibid. 179-180.

⁸² Ibid. 181.

⁸³ Ibid. 181-182.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 182-183.

First, doing theology interreligiously, as advocated and exercised in *L'hospitalité divine*, has probably many forerunners in the Islamic world and elsewhere. One may actually discover a whole tradition leading us all the way back to the times of the Christians from the 8th and 9th century onwards in the Middle East, who at home in the world of Islam, came to express their very denominational identities in the idiom of Islamic religious culture and in encounter with the evolving patterns of Islamic religious thought: As those Christians of the now called Oriental Churches found themselves as having to live more permanently as *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, as Sidney Griffith in his pioneering research on this unique history so aptly puts it,⁸⁵ those Oriental Christians then adopted the Arabic language. Already here we can picture two Arabic-speaking, religious communities (Christians and Muslims) influencing one another through language and practice in daily social, economic and intellectual intercourse. We can certainly imagine the opportunities provided to them already then for what Daou and Tabbara now call a »*théologies en dialogue*«, trying to give way to the development of Christian and Muslim theologies in a new register.

As Griffith has elaborated for us, the kind of interreligious theological hospitality is visible already there, in the ways these early Christian theological writers in Arabic articulated their Christian doctrines in parallel to, and almost in tandem with, the evolving patterns of Islamic religious thought during the same historical period: Christians sought to defend the reasonableness of their distinctive doctrines in terms of religious idiom they shared with their Muslim interlocutors and counterparts, who, in accord with the teachings of the Qur'ān, often rejected the central Christian doctrines. In contrast with the previously standard modes of Christian discourse in Greek or Syriac, the Arabic-speaking Christian writers often constructed their arguments on ways of thinking which the Muslims had initially elaborated in view of commending their own faith in the Qur'ān and in the traditions of the prophet Muhammad. More often than not, these Christian texts appear to be exercises in a Christian version of *kalām*, the characteristically Islamic style of religious discourse in Arabic. The apologetic agenda for the Christian *mutakallimūn* (theological controversialists, systematic theologians) in the Islamic world was largely set then via in some form hospitable act in response to the challenges to Christian faith voiced by Muslims in the early Islamic period. Griffith illuminates that the outcome of such interreligious encounter is that the discourse of the Christian *kalām* acquires a unique conceptual profile. For example, the approach there to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation reveal an effort to express the former in terms of the contemporary Islamic discussion of the ontological status of the divine attributes, the Qur'ān's »beautiful names of God,« and the latter in terms of the Islamic discussion of the signs of authentic prophecy and true religion. The intention of the Christian discourse composed in the Arabic language was certainly

⁸⁵ Cf. Sidney GRIFFITH, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, Princeton 2007.

both to sustain the faith of Christians living in that world and to commend the reasonableness and credibility of Christianity to their Muslim neighbors in their own religious idiom. Griffith tells us, however, that most of the Arabic Christian writers strove to translate and to clarify the doctrines and distinctive confessional formulae of their several denominations in their Arabic treatises and tracts, rather than to rethink in the Islamic milieu how best to articulate the Christian message anew.

Going back to these early and later Christian-Muslim engagements and sites of inter-religious theological hospitality, may offer the critical reader of Daou and Tabbara's *L'hospitalité divine* more insights for judging and qualifying their current theological formula as well as meet many more complementary accounts of that tradition of inter-religious hospitality (and one may add, also hostility) in the Middle East.

Second, literature on cultural and interreligious hospitality in philosophy, theology, and cultural studies has brought to the fore also distinct aspects of the hermeneutical or constructive acts involved with cultural and religious hospitality, one prominent being *translation*. Regarding connecting hospitality and translation, one of the prominent thinkers has been the late Paul Ricoeur. In his little study *Sur la traduction* (2004),⁸⁶ Ricoeur is dedicated to the enigma of linguistic diversity and the question of the (un-)translatability of languages. Beyond the mesmerizing discussion concerning the theoretical possibility or impossibility of translation, Ricoeur states that the appropriate attitude of a translator is one of *linguistic hospitality*.⁸⁷ His reflections on translation not only apply to natural languages, but are also relevant for inter-religious dialogue.⁸⁸ The translation of religious languages is a metaphor for the hermeneutical undertaking in which religious meanings are explained to ›outsiders‹. Ricoeur does not elaborate on this thought and challenges others to think through his conceptual suggestion.⁸⁹ An alternative philosophical account on the topic would be, for example, that of Alasdair McIntyre and his strong account of incommensurable traditions, paired with untranslatability and a need of conceptual and doctrinal bilingualism to achieve a kind of interreligious hospitality on matters of truth.⁹⁰ Suggesting that translation as a linguistic form resists semantic closure. Its hialat nature urges continually towards the breakthrough, straining to the limits of meaning, encouraging the stretching and play of words. Curiously, or perhaps not, it is in the attempt to translate certain forms of scripture, especially religions' scripture and doctrines, that one encounters a recognition of translations's ontic resistance to closure.

On this end, one would indeed need to start all over again in reading *L'hospitalité divine* and unpack in each chapter, how incommensurabilities between Islam and Christianity have been recognized and addressed, (un)accommodated in their careful and mutually responsive Christian-Muslim theology – and where the interreligious translational effort resisted closure. ♦

86 Paul RICOEUR, *Sur la traduction*, Paris 2004; in English: *On Translation*, London/New York 2006, translated by Eileen Brennan; with an introduction by Richard Kearney.

87 RICOEUR, *On Translation* (Ann. 86), 10.

88 *Ibid.* 25.

89 Cf. Marianne MOYAERT, Ricoeurs talige gastvrijheid: Een model voor de interreligieuze dialoog, in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 48 (2008) 42–65; IDEM, In Response to the Religious Other: Ricoeur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters, Lexington 2014.

90 For a detailed analysis of McIntyre's model and of the related questions of tradition, translation and incommensurability see Norbert HINTERSTEINER, *Traditionen überschreiten: angloamerikanische Beiträge zur interkulturellen Traditions-hermeneutik*, Vienna 2001.