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Overcoming the Imperialist Seduction: A Polylogue Reading of Mary towards a Theology of Peace

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Abstract: The current war waged by Russia against Ukraine once again sheds light on the ambivalent role of religion in violent conflicts, and especially the use of religious figures for imperialist political strategies. In this context, Mary is of particular interest, as she serves in Christian history (and presence) as the Queen of Peace, but could also take on characteristics of a warrior goddess. I suggest that investigating the complex use and abuse of Mary for imperialist strategies in the context of Christian–Muslim encounters can give some hints for overcoming the ever-present seduction of theopolitical imperialism, especially with regard to the current developments in parts of (Orthodox) Christian theology. Thus, I will first outline the premises of a political theology dedicated to peace that can only be worked out in a permanent polylogue of religions. Second, a historical overview shows the deep ambivalence of Mary as a theopolitical figure, particularly in the context of Christian–Muslim encounters. Thus, it is even more surprising that, thirdly, a close comparative reading of the Qur’anic Maryam can help to overcome the imperial theopolitical seduction. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about a theology of peace with particular regard to our conflictive times.

Keywords: Mary; Qur’an; political theology; theology of peace; comparative theology



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1. Introduction

The current war waged by Russia against Ukraine once again sheds light on the ambivalent role of religion in violent conflicts, and especially the use of religious figures for imperialist political strategies. In this context, Mary is of particular interest, as she serves in Christian history (and presence) as the Queen of Peace, but could also take on characteristics of a warrior goddess. This is nothing new in the history of religions. Particularly in the context of the conflicts between Byzantium and the rising Muslim empire, Mary has been deeply politicized. Also, in the early modern conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, Mary was used and abused for imperialist strategies. I suggest that the complex use and abuse of Mary in the history of Christian–Muslim encounters and their respective imperialist strategies can give important insights as to how to deal with current, dangerous theopolitical readings of Mary. My question is what does Mary, as an essential theological and historical junction between Christians and Muslims, tell us about a theology of peace that overcomes the ever-present seduction of imperialism?

I am fully aware that this endeavor might seem strange or provocative. Why should a Christian (specifically, Catholic) theologian consult Islam about a theology of peace? What could Christian–Muslim encounters around Mary ever highlight for current religiously fueled wars in the Christian context? Thus, I will first outline the premises of a political theology dedicated to peace. I argue that such a theology of peace can only be developed in a permanent polylogue, especially with religions in their plurality. Theology is not self-sufficient, but can only move on in a critical, humble, yet resolute, interaction with the respective other with which it is always entangled. In our case, this “other” is both the Qur’an as the theological foundation of Muslim faith and the history of Christian–Muslim relations. Second, a historical overview shows the deep ambivalence of Mary as a

theopolitical figure, particularly in the context of Christian–Muslim encounters in the early modern period. Thus, it is even more surprising that, thirdly, a close comparative reading of the Qur’anic Maryam in the context of late antiquity can help to overcome the imperial theopolitical seduction. Finally, I will draw some conclusions for a theology of peace with particular regard to our conflictive times. I will conclude that consulting the Qur’an and the history of Christian–Muslim relations can support a theological disarmament, which is a necessary prerequisite for peace. This call, however, is not only a call for Christians, but for any believer. Imperialist seduction is universal, as is the chance to overcome it, if believers are ready to read their sources in a critical polylogue.

2. Practicing Catholic Theology in a Polylogue Network with the Plural of Christian Theologies, the Political, and Islam

Whereof one cannot be silent, thereof one must speak. When the unthinkable happens and the world order is deeply shattered, theology cannot be silent. The task of theology is not to replace the daily news, but to look behind and critically analyze the deep structure of the turnovers in which we are living. The COVID-19 pandemic has put into question many aspects of our daily lives, but it is the war in Europe, the Russian invasion in Ukraine, that crushed the political order that had seemed so unquestionable. This crisis not only touches the political sphere, but also raises serious theological problems. In the context of this war, the religious and the political have forged alliances that demand a rigorous theopolitical critique. Interestingly, in this context, Mary appears as an ambivalent figure between the Queen of Peace and a warrior goddess. While icons of Mary were sent to the fronts, people were seeking refuge under Mary’s coat, and Pope Francis, on March 25 (Annunciation of the Lord), consecrated both Russia and Ukraine to “Our Lady” ([Vatican News 2022](#)). Is this consecration a simple “act of helplessness”, as the German systematic theologian Michael Seewald ([Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland 2022](#)) criticized? In order to overcome both the imperial abuse of Mary and the suspicion of theological helplessness in the face of the evil of war, I suggest consulting the Qur’anic Maryam and her critique of Byzantine imperialism.

Within Catholic theology, fundamental theology is the main discipline to give an account of faith and hope in the light of reason. However, who still asks for this faith and hope in our times? *Gaudium et Spes* called upon theology to interpret the “signs of time in light of the gospel”. Consequently, fundamental theology in particular is a bridge, a kind of manager in a permanently interacting network of *loci alieni* and *loci proprii*, the junctions within the epistemic network. In our times, there are three *loci* that I consider to be especially urgent for developing a constructive theology in service of humanity: the theological traditions of the Churches, Islam, and the political.

In course of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church opened itself to an intensive dialogue with the world. There is a deep conviction that one cannot be a (Catholic) Christian without the other. This called for a serious transformation of the epistemic foundations of Catholic theology. In particular, the German theologian Peter Hünemann contributed to this transformation of theology. He reinterpreted the classic Melchior Cano and his teaching of *loci theologici*. For [Hünemann \(2003\)](#), the theological traditions of the different churches and communities are a “locus proprius” of Catholic theology and, thus, have an essential epistemic authority. Catholic theology cannot do without reflecting upon Orthodox traditions, but this does not intend to enforce changes upon them. However, it is an invitation to the respective traditions to also start a conversation with Catholic tradition and, thus, move forward together, yet in differentiated ways.

Moreover, together with [Hünemann \(2003\)](#) I read Islam as a *locus alienis specialis* which shares many aspects with the Abrahamic discursive archive, but still has its distinct particularities when reading and interpreting this archive. The political, however, is referred to as a *locus alienus*, similar to history, philosophy, or the social sciences ([Van Erp and Brocken 2020](#)). This means that the political may exist without referring to the theological sphere, but the theological sphere cannot do without reflecting upon the political as long as

it exists in this world and intends to co-create this world. Thus, any theology necessarily includes a political dimension, but not every theology is a distinct “political theology”.

The meaning of “political theology” is very diverse, depending on the academic discipline and the respective school of thought. Phillips (2012) distinguishes three origins of political theology (Scripture, Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* and the rise of the specific discipline in the 20th century) and at least four approaches how to do political theology. Cavanaugh and Scott (2006, p. 2) define political theology as “the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God’s ways with the world”. Gregory (2013, pp. 99–101) offers four types of “political theology”. Type 1 is an analysis of anything that somehow deals with “religion and politics”. Type 2 discusses the ideas of Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss. Type 3 is “theological political theology” in the proper sense. It develops a specific theological interpretation of the political and aims at a kind of grand theory. Type 4 discusses special practices, movements, ideas and is particularly popular among anthropologists.

This article is dedicated to Gregory’s type 3 in the sense of a proper theological political theology and aims, as suggested by Cavanaugh and Scott (2006), at a critical discussion of theopolitical arrangements from the perspective of a polyloguous Catholic theology. We could call this way of practicing political theology “resolute theology”, following Keller’s (2008) differentiation between resolute, absolute and dissolute theologies. “Resolute theology” is the alternative to totalitarian (i.e., absolute) and nihilist (i.e., dissolute) theologies. This resolute political theology is based on four premises:

First, this theology does not aim at gaining any temporal power, but to serve God and this world when it seeks—together with the church—justice, peace, freedom and human dignity (Siebenrock 2020, pp. 204–5). In this regard, the speech of Pope Paul VI (1965) at the United Nations is essential. He describes his role and duty in front of mankind as follows: “He has no temporal power, no ambition to enter into competition with you. As a matter of fact, we have nothing to ask, no question to raise; at most a desire to formulate, a permission to seek: that of being allowed to serve you in the area of our competence, with disinterestedness, humility and love”. Bearing in mind the suffering of the world, especially the wars, Paul VI. has one essential message: “Never again war, never again war! It is peace, peace, that has to guide the destiny of the nations of all mankind!”

Second, there are *loci theologici* in this world which must not be ignored when practicing theology. Theology cannot reflect upon everything and must not overestimate its competences, but consequently ignoring the signs of the time that touch the heart of Christian faith and hope is highly problematic.

This leads to the third premise: whereof one cannot be silent, thereof one must speak—in public. Political theology is public theology that risks confronting the *tehom* of our present times. Catherine Keller (2008, pp. 45–68) makes us aware that the biblical answer to chaos is beyond violence. Creation comes into being because of God’s creative Word. In the *Enuma Elish*, the world is built from the womb of a dead, slaughtered being; human beings are made to serve the Gods as slaves. The biblical answer to the *tehom* is the non-violent, creative word. Speak whereof you cannot be silent—this calls upon the theologian to break the silence upon lie, violence and death.

Fourth, the word which breaks the silence most often evolves from the margins. I consider political theology to be an ec-centric theology from the margins. This means that it needs strong roots, both in an intellectual and existential sense. However, it also requires the courage to go beyond, to risk creative, non-conventional paths that allow new perspectives on seemingly unsolvable, deeply challenging problems. As Apollo 13 needed a swing-by maneuver in order to get back on track, church and theology may also need unconventional maneuvers.

Getting into dialogue with the Qur’anic Maryam is a kind of theological swing-by maneuver which can help Christian political theology to overcome the imperial seduction it too often becomes involved with, both in history and in contemporary times. Taking

the task of theology to stand up for freedom, peace, and justice seriously, we need to risk a responsive polylogue. In Dorothee Soelle's (2001) seminal book *The Silent Cry*, we find the idea that we cannot dance the dance of divine love on our own, but only together, in a community of lovers, i.e., faithful. This fits very well with Catherine Keller's reflections upon the permanent communication between God and mankind, the process of *eros* and *agape*. To respond to God's invitation to the divine dance of love in this world corresponds with serving humanity in fostering universal freedom, peace, and justice. Imperial powers, however, use figures of faith to justify the elimination of those considered the enemy. In the context of late antiquity, the Qur'an rejects a political theology that creates a goddess of war and kills in the name of God.

In the following, I will first of all give an overview how Mary was used and abused historically in the context of war, particularly during historical encounters between Christians and Muslims. Afterwards, the main part of the paper will discuss the transforming encounter between Mary and Maryam. In our times we cannot examine theology "without" or even "against" the other, but only in a fraternal polylogue of mutual understanding and sometimes correction. We will thus reflect how the Qur'anic intervention against the Byzantine imperial political Mariology can help us today to reject militarist political theologies and develop a theology of peace.

3. Mary and the Imperial Seduction: Some Historical Remarks

Mary is a highly ambivalent figure of faith, both in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. She is a figure of faith, but regularly crosses the border from popular devotion to various forms of superstition. She is a space of hope, a refuge in times of distress, the humble maid and mighty Queen of Heaven who sometimes turns into a warrior goddess. As we intend to consult the Qur'anic Maryam for a critique of political Christian Mariology, we need to have a special look on Mary in the context of Christian–Muslim relations.

Theologically, Mary is the only woman who is mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Sura 19 bears her name in the title—Sura *Maryam*. Both Sura 3 (*Āl Imrān*—the House of Imran) and Sura 5 (*Al-Māida*—the Table) include several very important verses on Maryam. In popular religion, Christians and Muslims together visit places of devotion like the House of Mother Mary (Turkish: *Meryemana evi*) or the Milk grotto in Bethlehem. In recent Muslim theology, Muna Siddiqui (2013) discusses in length the role of Mary/Maryam for Christian–Muslim relations. In the Christian context, the Second Vatican Council especially mentions and appreciates Muslim devotion for Mary in *Nostra Aetate* 3.

Historically, however, Mary was used both in the Christian confessional wars and in Christian–Muslim encounters as a political and military weapon. In the Catholic memory, particularly the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571) became essential. Lepanto turns into the "icon of the military battle of catholic aristocrats" (Scheer 2006, p. 302). In 1572, a special feast was dedicated to "Our Lady of the Victory". From 1573 onwards, the "Feast of the Rosary" was celebrated each first Sunday in October. In 1716, after the victory of Prince Eugen in Peterwardein (today: Novi Sad), this feast became compulsory for the whole Catholic Church. This was the case till 1969. Since then, it has been a simple day of remembrance. Today, Lepanto is still a traditionalist code word for an absolutist Catholic anti-identity.¹

In the Habsburg Empire, Mary became the central figure of the so-called "Pietas Austriaca". Mary fought for the emperor against other confessions, but especially against "the Turks" and "Mahometans". The melting of these interpretations can be seen in several images of "Mary the Victorious", paradigmatically in a copperplate engraving by Philipp Sadeler, dating to 1630 (Scheer 2006, p. 282). Amidst the Reformation and the continuous battles with the Ottomans, Sadeler depicts a militaristic Mary who kills the dragon with seven heads—a reference to the woman in the Book of Revelation, chapter 12. These seven heads are given the following names: Machiavellism, Judaism, Mahometism, atheism, gentilism, *impietas*, and *haeresis*. Within the Austrian memory, the Battle of Kahlenberg on September 12, 1683, became especially influential. Even today, the feast of the "Name

of Mary" is celebrated on September 12 and has a tendency to be abused for political demonstrations "against Islam". The official Catholic Church strongly rejects these interpretations. The annual feast in Vienna's St Stephen's Cathedral is a prayer for universal peace and freedom. However, there are traditionalist Catholic groups that still use the feast for expressing a Catholicism that is primarily characterized by an "anti-identity". Their military vocabulary is strikingly close to right-wing political populism. A prominent example is the Fraternity Pius X. and their celebration of the feast in 2022.²

In summary, in early modernity, Mary was a refuge in times of despair (cf. in particular the so called "Virgin of Mercy"), but also a figure of military violence and destruction. This is also true for the 20th century. During the First World War, a militaristic interpretation of Mary is a regular appearance (Scheer 2006, pp. 309–12). However, during and after the Second World War, Catholic references to Mary in the political context undergo severe transformations. Pope Pius XII. does not refer anymore to Mary crushing the serpent. He consecrates the whole world to the "Immaculate Heart of Mary" and prays for universal peace (Scheer 2006, p. 347). In the Austrian context, the "Crusade of Reparation of the Holy Rosary for Peace in the World" (Rosenkranz-Sühnekreuzzug), founded by Petrus Pavlicek OFM in 1947, prays for universal peace. It is no longer a prayer *against* an enemy, but a prayer *for* universal mankind. Former Chancellor Julius Raab was deeply convinced, that due to the continuous prayer of the "crusaders", the Soviet Union finally accepted the Austrian Independence Treaty (Kooperation Kirchenzeitungen 2022).

In the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, Mary has become a refuge and sign of hope for people in the mid of cruelties, but also a highly ideologized theopolitical instrument. After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, a special icon of Mary was created in Ukraine, depicting Mary as the protectress of all those fighting for Ukrainian independence in history and presence. In 2020, more than 20 000 of these icons were given to soldiers.³ On 13 March 2022, the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Cyril handed over an icon of Mary to the head of the Russian National Guard, Wiktor Solodow⁴, with the wish that Mary ought to inspire Russian soldiers to "defend their fatherland", protect the forces, and support the Russian victory (Katholische Nachrichtenagentur 2022). The Ukrainian Metropolitan Epiphanius strongly condemned this action: "The handing over of an icon by the head of the Moscow Patriarchate Cyril Gundyayev to the head of the Russian National Guard and the 'blessing' of murderers and cutthroats on Sundays in the liturgy is a spiritual crime" (Katholische Nachrichtenagentur 2022). A few days later, on the Feast of Annunciation, Pope Francis consecrated the world, Russia, and Ukraine to the "Immaculate Heart of Mary" (Vatican News 2022).

This brief overview clearly shows that Mary is still deeply involved in conflict and war with very different attributes given to her ranging from a Queen of Peace to a warrior fighting side by side with soldiers. She may be a refuge, a sign of hope, a caring mother, a mighty defender, an inspirator, etc.—the list is nearly endless. Any party in the context of a conflict could refer to her and the power connected with her, so that finally a range of different "Marys" could clash.

The theopolitical reference to Mary in our day is nothing new. It is deeply rooted in early modern conflicts, especially the confessional wars and the wars with the Ottoman Empire. Also within the Russian tradition, there is a repeated reference to Mary in military conflicts, particularly during the so-called "Great Patriotic War". However, the beginnings of theopolitical ideologization can be traced even earlier, namely in late antiquity, and thus the first centuries of the Church and the rise of Islam. If we speak about Mary as an ambivalent figure of faith, it is crucial to develop a critical perspective on possible criteria for a legitimate reference to Mary in theopolitical affairs. When and why does Mary turn into a figure of violence?

I argue that this criteriology is possible by doing a theological swing-by maneuver. On a theological level, the Qur'anic Maryam is a critique of imperialist abuses of Mary in the specific context of 7th century Byzantium. Reflecting upon Maryam will help us to carefully reconsider the relation between God, power, and humanity, and thus to reject an

imperialist instrumentalization of Mary while appreciating her potential as an invitation to peace and reconciliation.

4. Mary and Maryam: A Transforming Encounter

4.1. How to Read the Qur'an as a Christian Theologian: Some Introductory Remarks

When epistemically taking serious Islam as a *locus alienus specialis*, one is confronted with the revelatory status of the Qur'an. Can Christian theology recognize any public revelation after Jesus and thus consult the Qur'an *theologically*? So far, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is not totally clear on the possible revelatory status of the Qur'an. *Nostra Aetate* 3, the passage of the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* dedicated to Islam and Muslim faith, introduces the attribute "homines allocutum" when speaking about the God Muslims believe in. "Allocutum", however, refers to the *terminus technicus* "loquitur". This verb is used in the Constitution *Dei Verbum* to describe the act of revelation. Thus, one could be under the impression that the Council at least thought about some kind of revelation when speaking "cum aestimatione" about Muslim faith. However, *Nostra Aetate* gives no details and stays vague. O'Mahony (2007) and Caspar (1992) are convinced that the Council thought about the Qur'an as a legitimate divine revelation. Most recently, Appel (2018, 2021) explicitly discussed the Qur'an as a revelation for Christians.

We cannot debate this delicate question in detail here. I follow the careful distinction of David Burrell (2014, pp. 183–84): "Yet everything points to extending respect to Muslims' faith in the Holy Qur'an, and doing so in such a way as to facilitate a radical change of attitude towards Muslims parallel with that effected towards contemporary Jews. To be sure, the grounds will be different, but the logical impossibility of saying either 'yes' or 'no' to the incisive question whether the Qur'an can be considered a revelation, together with the commendations of *Lumen Gentium*, as well as the way 'ordinary Muslims' witness to a palpable sense of the presence of God in their lives, should all argue to the rightness (in the sense of a prudential judgment) of extending to them, as a community, respect for their faith in the Qur'an as revelation. This would represent a step beyond both *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*, which urged respect for Muslims but stopped short of acknowledging Islam as an inspired community, or *umma*. Yet, the extension could be a quite natural one, for respecting people for their faith certainly entails respecting its source as they ascribe it". If the Second Vatican Council speaks about Muslim faith "cum aestimatione" and if the Qur'an is the essential basis of this faith, then we need to consult the Qur'an with this same respect, i.e., "cum aestimatione".

As a Christian theologian who takes this epistemic estimation seriously, there are at least four possible ways to read and interpret the Qur'an. First, there is the possibility to do this in consultation with the Islamic exegetic tradition, i.e., the *tafsir* literature. Second, one might read together with Muslims in concrete dialogical practices such as Scriptural Reasoning. Third, as suggested by the eminent scholar Angelika Neuwirth (2019), we can read the Qur'an in the context of late antiquity and thus follow a historical-critical approach. Fourth, there is the possibility of a synchronic or holistic reading of the Qur'an, either as a whole or within individual suras.

Tatari and von Stosch (2021), both prominent scholars of comparative theology, combine Neuwirth's historical-critical method and a holistic reading of the Qur'an. I consider this to be very helpful, because it allows for understanding the entanglements of Christian and Muslim thought in late antiquity while appreciating the special status of the Qur'an as a religious text which is the key authority for Muslims. The Qur'an must not be ignored by Christians because many passages are directly addressed to Christians or openly criticize Christian practices or what is presented as Christian faith and practice.

Essentially, the Qur'an is not a text, but presents itself as the word, i.e., a speech that can never be fully grasped while "reading". Thus, I am also careful to speak about "reading" the Qur'an as a Christian theologian. I would rather call it the essay to enter into dialogue, to enter the tent and to carefully listen what I might hear and recognize in

encounter with a specific figure, namely the Qur'anic Maryam and her critique of the late antique Mary. What resonates within me and my theology while listening?

4.2. The Historical Context: Herákleios and His Imperial Use of Power

Throughout history, Mary has been deeply involved in theopolitical power plays. Within the Islamic context, the question of divine power and its consequences are crucial. According to Jonathan Brown (2019, p. 10) it is even the core: “In the Qur'an, God's power is the superlative of all superlatives. It is total, absolute, and without exception”. This is an important observation, but Brown misses an essential theopolitical hotspot in the Qur'an, namely Mary. In their comparative study of Mary in the Qur'an, Christian theologian Klaus von Stosch and Muslim theologian Muna Tatari show that the *topoi* of power, the abuse of power, and the imperialization of theology are essentially connected to Maryam. The historical background is the politicized and militarized Mariology of the Byzantine emperor Herákleios around the Avar siege 626.

Herákleios, born in 575 and Byzantine ruler from 610 onwards until his death in 641, is considered to be the last emperor of late antiquity and the first emperor of the middle Byzantine period. His rule was shaped by permanent battles with the Sassanids, the Avars, and the rising Muslim Arabs. In 614, Jerusalem was conquered by the Sassanids. This was a traumatic experience for the Byzantines who lost the city with its dogmatically loaded basilicas to Zoroastrians. Herákleios interpreted his war against the Sassanids as a holy war and also put increasing pressure on Jewish communities in the Byzantine Empire. In 625, he explicitly started a “holy war” and promised that any dead soldier would immediately go to heaven like the martyrs. The Byzantine Church, however, has not canonized any of the soldiers, although there developed a popular soldier-saint cult, both in late antique Christianity and early Islam, especially in the borderlands between Byzantium and the Muslim Empire (Heilo 2012; Tatari and von Stosch 2021, pp. 118–19).

Already during the reign of Justin (482–565), the emperor explicitly supported the devotion of Mary. Just in front of the city, in *Blachernae*, where later the Blachernae Palace would be built, the Church of the *Theotókos tón Blachernón* was raised. Here, Mary's incorruptible garment, some of the most sacred relics, were venerated. In the Byzantine memory, these garments saved the town several times in hopeless situations (Tatari and von Stosch 2021). Shoemaker (2008) compares several late antique sources on Marian relics in Constantinople and describes a kind of competition between different churches about which clothing of the virgin each one might present. The Church of the *Theotókos tón Blachernón* also hosted an icon—the *Blacherniótissa* or *Theotókos tón Blachernón*. This icon is the prototype of the so-called *Maria Orans* icons. The original icon was destroyed during a fire in 1433. However, there are traditions that the icon survived and was given to tsar Alexi Mikhailovich of Moscow in the year 1653. Patriarch Paisios of Constantinople sent a charter with the icon that ought to testify the authenticity of the *Blacherniótissa*. Lidov (2021, p. 96) highlights the political background of this transfer. During the 17th century, many Eastern Christian churches suffered under Ottoman rule and sought support from the tsars, but also intended to save their relics in Moscow, “the new capital of the Orthodox world, perceived as the third Rome”. By guarding one of the most prominent—and powerful—icons of the Christian world, Moscow sought to establish its role as the new centre of orthodoxy (Shevzov 2016–2017). Today, “Our Lady of Blachernae” (Богородица Влахернская) is kept in the Dormition Cathedral (Uspenskij sobor) in the Moscow Kremlin (Fonkich 2005; Pentcheva 2006; Shevzov 2016–2017; Lidov 2021, however, locates the icon in the Tretyakov Gallery). It is not sure whether the Moscow *Blacherniótissa* is the original Byzantine icon, but the technical, historical and stylistic analysis points to that possibility (Lidov 2021, p. 98).

During the reign of emperor Herákleios, the political and military appropriation of Mary, which had started in the 5th century, increased. While the Avars and Sassanids occupied the town in 626, Herákleios fought another battle in Armenia. It was a hopeless

situation for Constantinople. The city faced two hostile allies and had no political leader in town.

According to [Tatari and von Stosch \(2021, pp. 128–29\)](#), three sources from that time agree that the virgin herself saved the city: George of Pisidia, Theodore Syncellus and the *Chronicon Paschale*. In *Bellum Avaricum*, written shortly after the Avar siege by poet and imperial officer George of Pisidia, the invincible virgin protects the city ([Viermann 2021, p. 213](#)). Theodore Syncellus' homily on the siege puts Mary in an even more active military role. Already the title of the homily indicates the agency of the virgin: "Concerning the insane move of the godless barbarians and Persians against this God-guarded city, and their shameful withdrawal by the mercy of God through the Mother of God". [Whitby \(2022\)](#) suggests that Theodore was familiar with both, the poem *Bellum Avaricum* and the *Chronicon Paschale*. Theodore's homily is a huge appraisal of Mary, her power and authority that directly influenced the battle and urged God to intervene. Christ is mentioned, but the Virgin and the "Old Testament God of Battles" are the two main figures. The Virgin, however, "is the key divine influence, whether acting by herself through human agents or in the frequent pairing of 'God and the Virgin'", analyzes Michael [Whitby \(2022, p. 294\)](#). In Theodore's interpretation, it was the Virgin herself who killed the Avar soldiers through the hands of the Byzantines near her Church in Blachernae ([Deckers 2007, p. 14](#); [Viermann 2021, pp. 209–13](#)).

It is not certain whether the icon of the Blacherniōtissa and her garments were taken on the processions throughout the city ([Viermann 2021, p. 219, footnote 152](#)). What is for sure is that the miraculous survival of the city was ascribed to the Theōtokos. Some sources, especially Theodore Syncellus, ascribe her a divine power and authority next to God. This transforms her into the status of a quasi "divine protectress". Already before, Byzantium had been close to Mary, but Nadine [Viermann \(2021, p. 221; translation by M. Quast-Neulinger\)](#) highlights the decisive impact of the siege: "[...] it was not until the double siege of the summer of 626 that Our Lady was elevated to the status of the undisputed 'patron deity' of Constantinople; with annual ritualized commemoration, her rescue was officially anchored in the capital's collective memory".

Similarly, Averil [Cameron \(1978, pp. 79–80\)](#) summarizes: "By A.D. 626, the climactic year of the great siege of the city by the Avars and the Persians, the Virgin has emerged as the special protectress of Constantinople; her icon saves the people; she herself, they knew, had fought alongside them in the battle before the very walls of her church at Blachernae; henceforth her own hymn, the Akathistos, is adopted as the city's special hymn of thanksgiving to one whom the inhabitants now clearly envisage as their own special mediator". Moreover, [Cameron \(1978, p. 104, footnote 4\)](#) suggests that there are intriguing parallels between the cult of Mary after 626 and the cult of Athena Promachos.

Until today, orthodox liturgy celebrates the rescue of Constantinople by the Virgin on the fifth Sunday in lent time before Easter. The newly added prooemium to the Akathistos could indicate a kind of militaristic interpretation of Mary. She is praised as "defender and general" (Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ) who has "invincible power" (ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχουσα τὸ κράτος ἀπροσμάχητον) ([Viermann 2021, p. 225](#)). From a strictly monotheistic perspective, these are problematic developments, especially when observed from the exterior. One can possibly understand these interpretations of Mary within the context of an existential threat and the experienced miraculous rescue, but theologically we are confronted with serious challenges. Seemingly, there is a figure—Mary—next to God. Moreover, this figure is ascribed a specific kind of power that even influences God. This could question monotheism and divine power. On a practical level, already before the year 626 icons (and the emperor) were honored with the act of proskynesis. From a Byzantine perspective, this was, theologically absolutely legitimate. From an external perspective, however, one could be under the impression of a divinization of both the icon and the emperor ([Tatari and von Stosch 2021, pp. 128–30](#)).

In absence of Herácleios, the highest immanent strategist who stayed in Armenia, there appears another strategist in the mid of the crisis—the theōtokos. However, she does

not simply replace the emperor, as Viermann underlines. She is the decisive spiritual and military power, the “virgin strategist” (ἡ στρατηγὸς Παρθένος) and “shield companion” of Patriarch Sergios. Both are the city’s strategists in absence of the emperor, actually there appears a trinity of “strategists”—the absent emperor, the present Patriarch and the invincible Virgin. This is very visible in George of Pisidia’s *Bellum Avaricum* (Viermann 2021, pp. 218–20). For Viermann (2021, pp. 226–27), he is the key figure for shaping the Theotokos as a powerful military strategist. He could even be the author of the new prooemium of the Akathistos hymn. This new introduction ritualizes the invincible Theotokos and makes her part of the public liturgical and political memory. Averil Cameron (1978, p. 108; quoted in Viermann 2021: footnote 203) concludes: “Thus the siege and its triumphant conclusion became a demonstration of the intimate connection of the emperor, patriarch and people, all under the protection of the warrior-Virgin”.

These developments in and around Byzantium could be interpreted as a serious theological provocation, particularly with regard to the relation between political and divine power, the il/legitimate ways of relating oneself to God in the context of politics and the relation between God and creation in a broader sense. I interpret the Qur’an as fulfilling the original task of fundamental political theology as outlined at the beginning of this paper, i.e., to speak publicly whereof one cannot be silent. Where God’s power is abused for violent imperial strategies of death and destruction, one has to intervene.

4.3. Against the Warrior Goddess: The Qur’anic Critique

Mary is a key figure in the Qur’an, especially being the only woman mentioned by name (for an introduction see Haddad and Smith 1989; Mirza 2021). The essential verses for understanding the Qur’anic critique of an imperial abuse of Mary are to be found in Sura 5 *Al-Māida*. This sura belongs to the last period of revelation in Medina, possibly it is even part of the very last revelations and thus represents a kind of Qur’anic legacy for the community of believers, the umma. Tatari and von Stosch (2021, p. 259) observe that Maryam appears at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the sura. This happens in context of discussions about who really has power, how to legitimately speak about God, and how to understand the dependence of all creation from God.

I will particularly focus on three passages in Sura 5 and the remarks given by Tatari and von Stosch (2021, pp. 259–82). I do not intend to offer an encompassing interpretation. Instead, I will concentrate on the question of power and the relation between God—Maryam—creation/mankind and its consequences for a political theology that intends to overcome imperial violence associated with theopolitical instrumentalizations of Mary.

The first verse to consider is Q 5:17: “Indeed, the truth deny they who say, ‘Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary.’ Say: ‘And who could have prevailed with God in any way had it been His will to destroy the Christ, son of Mary, and his mother, and everyone who is on earth—all of them? For, God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them; He creates what He wills: and God has the power to will anything!’”⁵

This verse underlines that it is God alone who has power, nobody else—neither Christ nor his mother. We do not go into Christological debates that can be associated with this verse too, but focus on Maryam. The Qur’an radically rejects that anybody could have power apart from God. He is the one who has power over all things; anything between heaven and earth must submit.

When we reconsider the imperial Byzantine Mariology around 626, especially the new introduction to the Akathistos hymn, Mary appears as a figure of power, a strategist who can act on her own and influence God on behalf of her devotees. The Qur’an raises his voice against this problematic relation between God, power and creation and a seemingly diluted monotheism. If someone saved the town, it was God himself, but not the Virgin as a kind of parallel power (Tatari and von Stosch 2021, pp. 259–62).

The second passage are the verses Q 5:75–76: “75 The Christ, son of Mary, was but an apostle: all [other] apostles had passed away before him; and his mother was one who

never deviated from the truth; and they both ate food [like other mortals]. Behold how clear We make these messages unto them: and then behold how perverted are their minds! 76 Say: ‘Would you worship, beside God, aught that has no power either to harm or to benefit you—when God alone is all-hearing, all-knowing?’”

Already, Q 5:17 underlined the difference between God and man. This is deepened in these verses. Jesus and Mary are purely created, only God hears and knows. In Q 3:35 Maryam already testified that God is the one who hears and knows. [Tatari and von Stosch \(2021, pp. 269–78\)](#) speculate whether the Qur’an criticizes Julianist ideas of the 6th century C.E. which could have been given a mariological turn in the 7th century so that not only Jesus was seen as living without any biological needs, but also Mary.

Maryam, the mother of the Christ, is truthful and righteous. This could mean that she lives truthfully and thus fully in the way of God. This reading is very common in the Islamic tradition ([Tatari and von Stosch 2021, p. 269](#)). What is most important in the context of the late 620s, is the rejection of any kind of invulnerability of Maryam or her son. She is created as her son was created. Both are vulnerable and subject to biological processes. This is a pure contrast to the invulnerable Virgin, especially after 626. As Viernmann and Cameron have shown, the imperial Mariology increasingly turns the Theotokos into an invulnerable warrior-goddess who powerfully protects her town with her incorruptible garments kept in her churches, particularly the Blachernae Church.

The Qur’an rejects the idea of attributing Maryam with imperial power. Any real power can only be God’s power. Maryam does not belong to any worldly emperor; she is the truthful believer who is purely submitted to God alone.

The third passage we need to look at are the verses Q 5:109–120, especially verses 109–110 and 116–120 ([Tatari and von Stosch 2021, pp. 278–82](#)). The Qur’an entangles the createdness of Maryam and her son with the question of divine power and omnipotence. Q 5:109–110 takes us to the Day of Judgment. The assembled apostles and messengers testify that only God knows. Maryam and her Son are blessed, but they cannot act on their own nor influence God. Any intervention in this world is purely God’s will:

“109 On the day when God shall assemble all the apostles and shall ask, ‘What response did you receive?’—they will answer, ‘We have no knowledge; verily, it is Thou alone who fully knowest all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being’s perception.’ 110 Lo! God will say: ‘O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember the blessings which I bestowed upon thee and thy mother—how I strengthened thee with holy inspiration, so that thou couldst speak unto men in thy cradle, and as a grown man; and how I imparted unto thee revelation and wisdom, including the Torah and the Gospel; and how by My leave thou didst create out of clay, as it were, the shape of [thy followers’] destiny, and then didst breathe into it, so that it might become, by My leave, [their] destiny; and how thou didst heal the blind and the leper by My leave, and how thou didst raise the dead by My leave; and how I prevented the children of Israel from harming thee when thou camest unto them with all evidence of the truth, and [when] those of them who were bent on denying the truth were saying, ‘This is clearly nothing but deception!’”

The final verses Q 5:116–120 take up again the topic of power and omnipotence. The Qur’an depicts Jesus, son of Maryam, as a testimonial against any questioning of monotheism. He does not even share any knowledge with God, God alone knows:

“116 And lo! God said: ‘O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, ‘Worship me and my mother as deities beside God?’ [Jesus] answered: ‘Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, Thou wouldst indeed have known it! Thou knowest all that is within myself, whereas I know not what is in Thy Self. Verily, it is Thou alone who fully knowest all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being’s perception. 117 Nothing did I tell them beyond what Thou didst bid me [to say]: ‘Worship God, [who is] my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.’ And I bore witness to what they did as long as I dwelt in their midst; but since Thou hast caused me to die, Thou alone hast been their keeper: for Thou art witness unto everything. 118 If thou cause them to suffer—verily, they are Thy servants; and if Thou

forgive them—verily, Thou alone art almighty, truly wise!” [*anta l-‘azīzu l-ḥakīmu*] 119 [AND on Judgment Day] God will say: “Today, their truthfulness shall benefit all who have been true to their word: theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; well-pleased is God with them, and well-pleased are they with Him: this is the triumph supreme”. 120 God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that they contain; and He has the power to will anything”.

Commentators like Razi were fully aware that real Christians did not believe in a trinity of God-Jesus-Mary. Q 5:116 appeared to them as a rhetorical question (Tatari and von Stosch 2021, pp. 279–80). However, why does the Qur’an include Maryam here? In Byzantine imperial theology and its ritualization, the impression could indeed arise—and justifiably so—that a warrior goddess is placed next to God here, indeed that God virtually disappears behind an invulnerable, all-powerful strategist.

In view of the existential threat to the city, such a reaction by the residents is understandable. Where do we flee to in hopeless situations? However, when this fear leads to an imperial theopolitical staging of a power beyond God, then public objection is a necessity. The Qur’an provides this objection, especially in Sura *al-Mai’ida* and thus offers fundamental political theology in the best sense.

5. Maryam’s Anti-Imperial Breaking of the Silence

It is very remarkable that the very last verses of the final Medinan sura are dedicated to the question of who is the only legitimate power between heaven and earth. They are a reflection upon God’s omnipotence. Even more interesting is the fact, that this question is negotiated around Maryam, her relation to her son, God, and creation. The argument by Tatari and von Stosch, to understand the Qur’anic Maryam as an intervention against Constantinople’s imperial Mariology and its exaggerations after the Avar siege, is very convincing. However, we need to go further. In how far can the Qur’anic intervention against the Byzantine imperial political Mariology help us today to reject militarist political theologies and come toward a theology of universal justice and peace?

First, we will thus observe where today the border between the Queen of Peace and warrior goddess is crossed. Second, we outline the basics of a Marian disarmament strategy which will result in a criteriology how to speak about God, power and the human in our fragmented world, longing for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

5.1. The Return of the Warrior Goddess?

In our times, Mary moves again into the ideological center of a religiously loaded conflict, namely the Russian invasion of Ukraine. May it be historically accidental or not, but there is a tradition that the Blacherniōtissa, which had been at the core of the Byzantine imperial Mariology criticized by the Qur’an, was moved to Moscow. Do we experience these days a return of the “warrior goddess”, as Averil Cameron (1978) describes a branch of Byzantine Mariology, now in Russian garments? Both Russians and Ukrainians refer to Mary in the context of war and politics. We need to be very careful with theological judgements and take a step back before coming up with a criteriology for how to speak about Mary—and thus God, power and the human.

In the early 7th century, the Byzantines started to celebrate Mary as an invulnerable figure with increasingly divine features, a virgin who herself enters the battle. The Qur’anic intervention reminds Christians that Mary is full of grace, but nevertheless a vulnerable human creature. Maryam is truthful and just because of her humility and faith towards God, but she has no power independent from God or even over God. All power is God’s. In this regard, Q 5:120 seems to be essential. God alone has *mulk*, indicating that God is the only true sovereign. Byzantine rulers, however, started to speak about Mary as a quasi-divine authority that legitimated their sovereign worldly rule. Already in the 5th century, Cyril of Alexandria preached that only through Mary kings could rule (Tatari and von Stosch 2021, p. 123, footnote 62). After emperor Justin’s death, Mary took the message

to the new emperor and handed over the imperial insignia (Cameron, quoted in: [Tatari and von Stosch 2021](#), p. 125).

Throughout history, not only Byzantines crossed the border between seeking refuge by the truly faithful mother of Christ and creating an invulnerable warrior virgin that fights the enemy. During the Ottoman Wars, Viennese preacher Abraham a Sancta Clara publicly declared, that following God's command, Adam gave every animal a name and ruled over them. Similarly, Mary followed God's command when giving Jesus his name, and now still rules over him: "Non rogans, sed imperans. Everything happens in and according to Mary's will, and all people's salvation is in Mary's power" (Abraham a Sancta Clara, quoted in: [Bachl 1983](#), p. 30; translation by M. Quast-Neulinger).

Particularly when bringing together the mother of Christ and the woman in Revelation chapter 12 who fights the dragon, i.e., Satan, Mariology easily turns into an eschatological battlefield that is highly prone to militaristic appropriations. While Mary is used as a figure of identification for one's own party, the other is identified with Satan. Consequently, the other becomes the eternal, absolute enemy and the immanent conflict turns into a metaphysical battle of good versus evil ([Bachl 1983](#), p. 32). Mary fights the enemy of the Church and defends the land of the fathers. When the European nation states arose, Mary was nationalized ([Bachl 1983](#), p. 33). Especially in context of interpretations of the Fatima apparitions, Mary became the warrior figure against Communism. However, according to Gottfried Bachl, National Socialism and fascism were not the focus of the Fatima apparitions. After the Second Vatican Council, a number of "Marys" appeared and called against evil renewals like too much liberalism or democracy. [Bachl \(1983, p. 35; translation by M. Quast-Neulinger; capitals in the original\)](#) consequently speculates about a possible closeness between a specific kind of militaristic Mariology and totalitarian political ideology. He warns: "The admonishing call to childishness, submissiveness and loyalty to institutions, the call to blind obedience, the fear of reflection and maturity, are symptoms of a GREAT MOTHERLINESS whose reality is still present in the social fabric of the community of faith".

In the current war in Eastern Europe, we can observe two Mariologies and their specific theopolitical entanglements. While one branch nationalizes and militarizes Mary for the imperial project of a "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) including "political and ecclesiastical control over Belarus, Ukraine and other parts of neighboring countries" ([Stoeckl 2022](#), p. 40), another branch relies upon Mary as the vulnerable protectress of the wounded, calling for universal human dignity and solidarity.

Lydia [Lozova \(2022\)](#) exemplarily analyzes several icons that were painted after 2014, the year of the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and especially in 2022. She underlines that the majority of Ukrainian icons focus on Mary as a sign of hope, a caring mother who suffers with the people and stands for universal freedom, solidarity, and human dignity while expressing anger and pain in the mid of the war. For [Lozova \(2022, p. 8\)](#), vulnerability is essential for understanding the ethos inherent to these icons. This is particularly visible in an icon of the Eleusa type by Ivanka Krypiakevych-Dymyd with the inscription "Mista nema Ammore zostalos" (The city is gone, but the sea remains)⁶. These words refer to the complete destruction of Mariupol. The icon, painted quickly in red and white, expresses the cruel violence, death, and destruction while Mary tenderly hugs her child. This icon is even more touching, when remembering the mass deportation of Ukrainian children during the ongoing war ([Snyder 2022](#)). But also in Ukraine, there is the danger of a militant Mary, especially with regard to the campaign "Icons for munition" which sells icons in order to buy munition for sharpshooters. A newly painted "Saint Javelina", a Mother Mary carrying a Javelin anti-tank system instead of the baby Christ, raises serious theological questions ([Lozova 2022](#), pp. 8–9).

Similar to the situation of Byzantium or the period of the Ottoman wars, we need to understand the existential threat, the concrete fear and experience of annihilation, but this does not excuse us from the demand to carefully relate to figures of faith and withstand the seduction of introducing divine power into immanent conflicts.

Stoeckl (2022, p. 42) makes aware of a “spiritual security doctrine” being used by the Russian regime to justify “war on Ukraine, and in an enlarged perspective, on the West”. The current war should not simply be interpreted as a religious war, because the situation is complex. However, it is essential to reflect upon the diverse and conflictive use of religious figures like Mary both from a theological and social-sciences perspective. The task of theology is to critically contextualize the constructions of Mary and offer normative options in how far these constructions are legitimate “sub ratione Dei”. This means, do they correspond with faith in God as the *Summum Bonum*, ultimate love and life in a universal, inclusive perspective?

Let us summarize. Externally, the militarized Mary sharply distinguishes between us, the soldiers of God, and them, i.e., the representatives of the Satan. The immanent conflict is turned into a metaphysical war and becomes part of an imagined greater eschatological fight of good versus evil. There is no compromise, no dialogue, nothing but annihilation of the enemy. The militant Mary delegitimizes the other—may it be the political, the religious or the confessional other—and dehumanizes the opponent.

Internally, this Mary keeps her devotees like obedient children. They are caught in a strict hierarchy and completely dependent on their Great Mother. The militarized Mary is invulnerable, untouchable, beyond any worldliness. According to Bachl (1983, pp. 35–37), it is especially her virginity that moves her beyond this world. The virgin warrior is without any *eros*. Bachl is fully aware of the complex entanglement of totalitarian ideologies with highly exclusivist, patriarchal gender hierarchies. The militarized Mary that is at the same time beyond any *eros* is a focal point of this intertwining. Moreover, Mary herself becomes a kind of divine power. Thus, the path to polytheism and genocide is easily gone. Our nation’s Mary will defeat the enemy’s wrongful Mary and annihilate the other that is possessed by Satan. This Mary is neither a prototype of faith, nor universal, but the consequence of imperial egocentrism (Halbmayer 2022, p. 106).

The Qur’anic Maryam is not only a warning for Byzantine imperialists, it is a warning for any imperialist abuse of the divine. The Muslim theologian Adnane Mokrani (2022) works out the deeply anti-imperialist message of the Qur’an which was perverted in the decades after the revelation of the Qur’an by the ruling classes. Mokrani, however, rejects this imperialist appropriation of the Qur’an and questions the legitimacy of the expansionist movement. During the Umayyad Empire, “the war machine had become an effective instrument of gain and prosperity for the empire through loot and poll taxes. It was also a way to ease internal tensions, in Girardian terms, always searching for an external enemy, a scapegoat, to resolve the internal mimetic rivalry” (Mokrani 2022, p. 79). For Mokrani (2022, p. 82), “it is essential to dismantle the past and modern war ideologies”. I argue that a subsequent theology of peace can only be a polyloguous theology that corrects each other’s imperialist seductions and enhances each other’s desire for peace by recognizing our universal vulnerability in face of the Divine.

5.2. Marian Disarmament—Divine Empowerment: A Little Criteriology

The Qur’anic Maryam is a warning how not to speak about Mary, God, and power. However, how can we refer to Mary, God, and power from a Christian point of view? This is particularly challenging in a theopolitical context that is all too close to instrumentalization and violence.

First of all, theology needs to break the silence, both about war and Mary. Gottfried Bachl (1983, p. 41) introduced the term “disarmament” (*Abriistung*). If theology flees a rigorous rational and existential disarmament, the warmongers on the battlefields, in the churches and the libraries can continue their work. If systematic theology ignores Mariology, because it seems so close to popular superstition and was abused too long for highly dangerous purposes, this abuse will continue and create new forms of violence and oppression.

Second, disarmament does not mean depoliticization. Theologically, Mary is the exemplary human being who shows in her life how the redeemed faithful can freely

answer God's call. She is transparent to God and God's power, but does not have power herself. She is not invulnerable, but her trust in God's absolute power testifies a life-giving empowerment which juxtaposes any imperialist power on earth. This is a central message of the Magnificat (Luke 1,46–55). Mary is not invulnerable, but in her pain and suffering, her joys and hopes she is fully preserved by God. She is a symbol of universal humanization which realizes the positive potential inherent in every human being (Quast-Neulinger 2022).

The papal consecration prayer on March 25, 2022 expresses this Mariology of trust and human empowerment. The immaculate heart is the vulnerable heart that according to Pope Francis invites "the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine" to the path of justice and peace (Vatican News 2022). This is no act of despair or superstition, but the consequence of a radical theological disarmament and the symbol of a resolute political theological that empowers to transform the church and the world.

Disarming Mary paves the way for a theology and church that courageously stand up for freedom in cultures of fear; that advocate human dignity where humiliation is the daily practice; that give birth to a new world.

5.3. *Doing Theology in a Polylogue Network: Some Final Reflections for the Future of Christian–Muslim Relations*

This article intended to be an example of "practicing theology" in a polylogue with the traditions of the Churches, Islam, and the Political, specific *loci theologici* Christian theology must not ignore if the church wants to stay true to its sending of testifying peace to this world. I want to conclude with some reflections on the future of theology within the sphere of Christian–Muslim relations. The concept of practicing theology in polylogue network goes beyond comparative theology. It takes the results of comparative theology as a starting point for a creative constructive theology which takes seriously the Christian sending to testify peace to this world. This has to be made explicit both on a doctrinal and practical level. The example of Mary and Maryam and their ab/use in theopolitics throughout history clearly shows the entangled character of doctrine and practice. The figures of faith deeply shape the concrete actions of the faithful and vice versa.

The future of theology will be seriously influenced by the way Christians and Muslims (and the other faithful in their particular traditions) carefully read each other's doctrine and practice. When we are able to take the respective "other" as a legitimate source of epistemic capital and thus grant each other epistemic authority in our theologies, we have taken a huge step forward towards real human fraternity, as suggested by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Al-Tayyeb in the *Declaration on Human Fraternity*.

Practicing theology in a polylogue network also means that theology is a permanent process of interactions that will never conclude until the eschaton. It indicates that the highest criteria of our theologies are a threefold humility: humility on an epistemic level, humility towards God and finally, humility towards our brothers and sisters. In this sense, this article might be understood as the humble essay to dive into the process of theology, interacting as a Christian theologian between the Churches, the Political and Islam as *loci theologici* that must not be ignored when looking for a theology of peace in our times and beyond.⁷

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Notes

- ¹ A striking example is the *Fondazione Lepanto*, led by Prof. Roberto de Mattei. This institution is characterised by a strictly traditionalist catholicism, anti-modernism and an explicit anti-Muslim ideology. For an overview see their website: <https://www.fondazionelepanto.org/> (accessed: 25 July 2023).
- ² For a documentation of the fraternity's celebration see: <https://www.fsspx.at/de/news-events/news/maria-namen-feier-2022-wien-76500> (accessed: 25 July 2023). By “anti-Catholicism” I mean a specific kind of Catholicism which defines itself primarily as “against” the other. Marking the distinction from the “non-Catholic” is a central feature of this kind of Catholicism.
- ³ I owe this information a conversation with Prof. Stefan Newerkla, University of Vienna, in summer 2022. The following report by Channel 5 covers the presentation of the new icon and its handing over to the soldiers: <https://www.5.ua/ru/obshchestvo/voyni-pod-pokrovom-bohorodytsi-kak-v-kyeve-ykoni-dlia-ukraynskykh-voennikh-osviashchaly-206156.html> (accessed: 25 July 2023).
- ⁴ Transcription of the name according to Katholische [Katholische Nachrichtenagentur](#) (2022).
- ⁵ All verses are taken from the English translation by Muhammad Asad (1980), *The Message of the Qur'an*.
- ⁶ The icon can be seen on the following account: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1845934725600427&set=pb.100005517523045.-2207520000.&type=3> (accessed: 25 July 2023). Transcription according to Lozova 2022.
- ⁷ This article is based on my lecture “Whereof one cannot be silent. . .With Mary/Maryam towards a theology of peace”, part of the tenure track process at the University of Innsbruck, 5 April 2022, but was seriously revised and enlarged for publication. Parts of my arguments were taken up by the Slavist Stefan M. Newerkla (University of Vienna), to whom I had provided the text of my lecture, for the 15th Maimonides Lectures at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (24 November 2022) and who, with reference to my person, elaborated in his lecture on representations of Mary and their politicization in the Slavic context.

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