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Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis: A Comparative Study on Practical Theology as Lived Experience with the Divine Action

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Abstract

Inspired by the concept of Christopraxis, this paper introduces Qur'anopraxis for the first time, establishing a dialogue between the two through trusted epistemologies. Qur'anopraxis focuses on divine action as "God's coming to people" as manifested in the Qur'an. To develop Qur'anopraxis, this study employs the methodological framework of Christopraxis from a trans-religious perspective and utilizes a Gadamerian hermeneutic that acknowledges the fluid nature of reality across different contexts. Christopraxis is centered on emmanual experiences, in which individuals engage in concrete, tangible encounters with Jesus Christ, while Qur'anopraxis similarly presents divine action through experiences with the Qur'an. By comparing Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis, this paper underscores the analogous roles of Jesus in Christianity and the Qur'an in Islam in interpreting first and second order emmanual experiences.

Keywords

practical theology, Christopraxis, Qur'anopraxis, divine action, emmanual experiences

Introduction

“Practical theology,” developed primarily by Friedrich Schleiermacher, has been an integral part of systematic Christian theology since the early nineteenth century. For most Christian theologians, particularly within the context of twentieth-century Protestantism, practical theology is defined by its emphasis on the local congregation, pastoral care, preaching, and apologetics. In contrast, the term practical theology has not gained widespread acceptance among Muslim theologians, as there is no clear understanding of it in an Islamic context. Practical theology in Islam is commonly associated with jurisprudence (*fiqh*) or the rules of sharia that govern the actions of Muslims and Muslim communities in everyday life.

Practical theology extends beyond the actions of believers to encompass the broader dimensions of divine agency. It includes God’s creative, guiding, and sustaining actions toward all creation, as well as the salvific work directed toward believers. The most pivotal divine act within the Christian tradition is embodied in Christ, particularly through the foundational events of atonement and salvation that are offered to all humanity—or at least to all who believe. In parallel, the Qur’an represents a profound expression of divine action in Islam, where God communicates with humanity and offers guidance toward redemption. In this paper, I shift the focus beyond these primary acts of divine intervention to explore the notion of divine action as “God’s coming to people” in tangible, lived experiences—a phenomenon I refer to as “emmanual experience.”¹

Given that the emmanual experience has been largely overlooked in historical Islamic practical theology,² I propose the term “Qur’anopraxis”

- 1 In the literature of Christopraxis, particularly in the works of Tanya Luhrmann and Andrew Root, the experience of God’s coming to people is often referred to as evangelical experiences. However, in Christian theology, the term evangelical encompasses a range of meanings and nuances, and there are more precise terms within Christian thought that could be used. Furthermore, the Greek term *euangelion* (from which the English term evangelical is derived) means good news, a meaning that does not entirely align with this paper’s intended usage. As such, the term “emmanual” is employed in this context to denote such experiences rather than evangelical. Emmanuel is a Hebrew term that translates to “God is with us” or “God with us.” This name is most notably found in the Bible, specifically in the Book of Isaiah (7:14). In Christian theology, Emmanuel symbolizes God’s incarnation—God coming to dwell in human form through Jesus Christ, offering salvation to His people.
- 2 We will take a simplified approach and examine all practical aspects of Islamic theology under the term “Islamic practical theology,” even though this terminology is not commonly used.

to articulate a facet of Islamic practical theology focused on divine action as manifested through the Qur'an. Coined for the first time in this paper, Qur'anopraxis offers a unique lens for understanding the relationship between believers and the Qur'an within the Islamic tradition. This concept acknowledges the multifaceted nature of religious practice and underscores the dynamic interplay between divine action and human agency in Islam.

To maintain methodological coherence, this paper follows the procedural framework established by systematic Christopraxis to systematize the concept of Qur'anopraxis.³ By its very nature, Islamic theology possesses an expandable capacity to draw from the achievements of modern Christian practical theology while upholding Islamic principles and concepts.⁴ Furthermore, Islam allows for the discussion of its practical doctrines alongside those of Christianity, facilitating the development and enhancement of Christian practical theology. Therefore, this paper focuses on Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis—two features of Christian and Islamic practical theology that center on divine action—as gateways to fostering dialogue between Christianity and Islam on the topic of practical theology.

The primary question this paper seeks to answer is: What is Qur'anopraxis in the context of Islamic emmanual experiences, and how does it compare to Christopraxis, particularly within the Lutheran tradition? Before addressing these questions, however, we must consider three other points into consideration. First, it is essential to clarify the epistemological frameworks upon which our approach is grounded. Second, we need to explore the relationship between theory and praxis, as religious praxis is

3 Christopraxis has gained prominence among Lutheran practical theologians, particularly following Andrew Root's introduction of the concept in *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Fortress Press, 1991). This article draws on the framework Root established there as an appropriate foundation for Qur'anopraxis. However, the term Christopraxis holds other significant connotations. See, for instance, Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action* (Fortress Press, 1995), 69. Arens writes: "precisely because God never appears thematically in Jesus' parables, they make it possible to thematize God in a new way. This does not occur in such a way that where human beings act, the action under discussion would actually be God's. Instead, the statement runs in the opposite direction: God acts where human beings do God's will." This approach diverges from the direction taken in the present paper.

4 At times, I use the term "Lutheran" instead of "Christianity" because the concept of Christopraxis discussed in this paper is framed within the Lutheran tradition. However, I refer to Christianity when addressing the broader aspects of the religion. Similarly, since Qur'anopraxis can be adapted within both Sunni and Shia sects, I use the term Islam to denote this context.

rooted in theories that shape believers' mental, behavioral, and cultural identities. In other words, we must examine how a theory translates into praxis within a specific context. Third, we should compare the roles of Jesus Christ in Christianity and the Qur'an in Islam to provide a comprehensive understanding of divine action as God's coming to people in the form of an emmanual experience.

1. Epistemological Framework

Real emmanual experiences in Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis cannot effectively be interpreted through a lens that views reality as a fixed, non-competing entity perceived in the same way by everyone. As Frithjof Schuon states, "any truth can in fact be understood at different levels and according to different conceptual dimensions."⁵ Instead, a fluid approach, characteristic of postmodernism⁶ and often referred to as fluid reality, provides a more suitable framework for understanding these experiences. As Jean-François Lyotard articulates:

In postmodernity, reality is seen as fragmented and constructed through language and discourse. There is no single, unified reality, but rather multiple, competing realities based on different perspectives and narratives.⁷

In this context, Hans Georg Gadamer suggests that understanding and interpreting reality is not about grasping an objective truth but engaging with the meanings and contexts through which reality is experienced. Gadamer emphasizes the interpretive process and the dialogical nature of understanding rather than the pursuit of objective reality. For him,

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- 5 Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, introduction by Huston Smith (Quest Books, 2005), 1.
 - 6 I acknowledge that the debates surrounding postmodernism, most prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, may not seem like a fresh topic for discussion. However, I use the interpretive framework as a means to engage with the diverse approaches to reality that postmodern thought offers. This exploration allows for a nuanced understanding of how multiple perspectives can coexist and inform our interpretations of meaning in various contexts.
 - 7 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 60.

understanding is about experiencing reality in the fullness of its meaning, not merely perceiving it objectively.⁸

This means that one of postmodernism’s primary functions is to move reality beyond the confines of objectivity. It “rightly rejects the myth that all knowledge is objective.... We are involved as moral and personal agents in all that we know.”⁹ From this perspective, reality does not present itself equally to all; rather, it is deeply intertwined with cultural, psychological, sociological, and historical backgrounds, influencing the personality of the experienter.

I contend that this approach does not necessarily lead to relativism regarding reality itself or the rejection of any objective reality. Fluid reality signifies how reality manifests itself differently for individuals based on their traditions, fostering a positive form of religious pluralism. This perspective is, indeed, epistemological rather than ontological. As emphasized in the quotes from Schuon and Lyotard, “truth” can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Schuon illustrates this claim of “exoteric” by stating:

The exoteric claim to the exclusive possession of a unique truth, or of Truth without epithet, is therefore an error purely and simply; in reality, every expressed truth necessarily assumes a form, that of its expression, and it is metaphysically impossible that any form should possess a unique value to the exclusion of other forms; for a form, by definition, cannot be unique and exclusive, that is to say, it cannot be the only possible expression of what it expresses.¹⁰

In essence, people may encounter the same reality in diverse forms and expressions. Here, we align with critical realism as articulated by John Searle, “realism does not say how things are but only that there is a way that they are.”¹¹ Furthermore, the acquisition of knowledge is not confined to reasoning or public, repeatable experiences. Blaise Pascal’s assertion (which predates postmodernism) that “the heart has its reasons which reason cannot know” underscores this point, according to Ray Anderson.¹²

8 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (Continuum, 2004), 262.

9 Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Fortress, 1991), 20.

10 Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 18.

11 John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (Free Press, 1995), 155.

12 Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 20. See also Blaise Pascal, “Pensées (Thoughts)” in

Gadamerian hermeneutics regarding fluid reality thus create an appropriate environment for interreligious dialogue regarding emmanual experiences in Christianity and Islam.¹³ This interaction ideally leads to a transcendent unity of religions, often referred to as the Perennial Wisdom. Perennial Wisdom lies not in religions' doctrines but in their shared quest for the divine, revealing a universal truth that transcends individual traditions and speaks to the common yearning of the human spirit. As Schuon states:

There should now be no difficulty in understanding that the Divinity manifests Its Personal aspect through each particular Revelation and its supreme Impersonality through the diversity of the forms of Its Word.¹⁴

Therefore, the expectation arising from Gadamerian hermeneutics in interreligious dialogue on practical theology, supported by Andrew Root's critical realist perspective, emphasizes:

The placing of trusted epistemology in discourse with other people's trusted epistemologies, respecting that we both trust and believe our own epistemologies but recognize that our trusted epistemologies see reality in distinctly different ways.... It reminds us that we share the limitation of our deeply held epistemologies in possessing all of reality.¹⁵

This is not a superficial or compromised form of religious pluralism; rather, it reflects a profound understanding of the relationship between the emergence of reality and the traditions through which that reality is revealed to humanity—especially when discussing the phenomenon of God's coming to people.

Pensées (Thoughts) and Other Writings, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford Press, 2008), 278.

13 In section 4.1 of this paper, the intricacies of Gadamerian hermeneutics will be discussed.

14 Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 26.

15 Root, *Christopraxis*, 239.

2. Theory and Praxis

Modern definitions of practical theology vary within the Christian context.¹⁶ I pay particular attention to Karl Immanuel Nitzsch's definition,¹⁷ as he emphasizes the theoretical nature of practical theology, describing it as "theory of ecclesial processes."¹⁸ Henk de Roest explains Nitzsch's idea about the nature of practical theology as follows:

Practical theology is a *science* of its own, in which insights from other sciences and knowledge from non-ecclesial experiences are necessary.¹⁹

In these two quotations, the terms "theory" and "science" convey the idea that practical theology fundamentally represents a type of knowledge that describes theological praxis. Nitzsch's definition could be adapted to "the theory of theological praxis" in order to apply it more broadly across other religions. This distinction between practical theology and theological praxis is significant; the former relates to the cognitive realm, while the latter emerges in human behavior. This aligns closely with Don S. Browning's notion of practical reason, where he states:

By focusing on practical reason, I mean to point to the use of reason to answer the questions, What should we do? and How should we live?²⁰

Such a meticulous distinction between "practical theology as theory" and "theological praxis" brings us closer to what we mean by Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis. Although Christopraxis is typically regarded as practical

16 Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 24–26.

17 Karl Immanuel Nitzsch was a significant figure in the development of practical theology. He emphasized the importance of applying theological concepts to everyday life and practice, focusing on the integration of faith and action. Nitzsch believed that practical theology should address real-world issues and serve the needs of the community, making theology relevant and accessible. He advocated for a theology that is not only theoretical but also deeply engaged with the practical aspects of human existence, emphasizing the role of the church and the importance of pastoral care.

18 Karl Immanuel Nitzsch, *Praktische Theologie. Erster Band. Einleitung und Erstes Buch. Allgemeine Theorie des Kirchlichen Lebens* (Adolph Marcus, 1847), 29.

19 Henk de Roest, *Collaborative Practical Theology*, vol. 8 of *Theology in Practice* (Brill, 2020), 95.

20 Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Fortress, 1991), 10.

theology within the Christian tradition, it is crucial to clarify and underscore that, in this paper, it fundamentally pertains to the theory of divine acts—acts that are directly related to and concretely experienced by the faithful.²¹ The practical application of this theory allows individuals to engage in a direct, embodied experience of Jesus Christ. Similarly, by introducing the term Qur'anopraxis, I do not aim to refer to actions based on the Qur'an. Instead, Qur'anopraxis denotes the theory of divine acts as embodied in the Qur'an, which can be reflected in the believers' interaction with the Qur'an through outward expressions and practical manifestations. Indeed, Qur'anopraxis, as the theory of divine acts, results in lived experiences and embodied interactions that individuals cultivate with the Qur'an in their daily lives.

At a deeper level, the dynamic interrelation between theory and praxis, as articulated in Karl Barth's teachings, serves as a foundational conviction (or theological axiom): "praxis and theory, church and theology, love and knowledge, simply cannot be set over against one another."^{22, 23} Anderson emphasizes this idea, stating:

Theory and practice inform and influence each other in such a way that all practice includes theory, and theory can only be discerned through practice.²⁴

While this interrelation can be applied generally to praxis and theory, it gains particular significance when theory refers specifically to practical theology as the "knowledge" of theological praxis. The significance of this dialectical relationship becomes especially evident in religious rituals, where believers find themselves immersed in a fusion of theory and praxis. A quintessential example of such rituals in Christianity is the Eucharist, or communion, which facilitates a direct, embodied engagement with Christ. The Eucharist symbolizes the tangible manifestation of Christ's body and blood, consumed in remembrance of his sacrificial act. Through this communal act of worship, believers not only recall the historical event of Christ's crucifixion but also participate in a living encounter with the divine through the physical elements of bread and wine. In the Eucharist, theory transcends

21 While it is possible to broaden the scope of Christopraxis to include the study of believers' responses and reactions, such considerations are of secondary importance for the purposes of this paper.

22 Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

23 Hence Barth's careful specification of his theological project as church dogmatics.

24 Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 21.

mere intellectual abstraction; it is actualized and embodied through the lived experience of the faithful. The sacrament thus serves as a profound existential moment, drawing the faithful into the mystery of Christ's presence and inviting their active participation in the divine life. Through this sacred practice, believers come to experience the living reality of Christ's role in their lives, thereby transforming their theoretical understanding of his significance into tangible, spiritual praxis.²⁵

Barth, moreover, asserts the precedence and dominance of praxis over theory, viewing the understanding of Christ's role—the light of life—as “a theory which has its origin and goal in praxis.”^{26, 27} In the realm of Christopraxis, this represents the highest level of interrelation between theory and praxis. We may further posit that the understanding of Christ's role itself can be regarded as praxis; when theory is understood, it is fundamentally practiced. However, by understanding, we do not refer solely to a mental action reflecting an external phenomenon. Understanding, as defined by Gadamerian hermeneutics, constitutes a state of human existence intrinsic to human experience.²⁸ In this framework, understanding occurs in a dialectical interplay between human and the being that reveals itself through existence. Thus, Barth's perspective can be expanded to include the assertion that “the understanding of Christ's role is itself a form of praxis.”²⁹ When Christ's role is revealed to humans and understood, theory is governed by praxis, ranging from praxis as the foundation of theory to the dominance of praxis over theory.

In the Islamic context, the understanding of the Qur'an as the light of life,³⁰ akin to Christ as he is described in the Bible,³¹ can likewise be discerned through the graded dominance of praxis. This concept is evident in Qur'anic verses that convey imperative propositions, as the meaning

25 However, the correlation between praxis and theory varies based on context and subject matter. For example, if theory pertains to theoretical dogmatic theology, this relationship may not be as closely tied.

26 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/3, eds. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (T & T Clark, 1955-1961), 79.

27 Browning criticizes Barth for adopting a theory-to-practice perspective. Regardless of the accuracy of this critique, we are inspired by Barth's emphasis on the interrelation and domination of praxis over theory.

28 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 62–65.

29 It appears from Barth's words that understanding Christ's role is theory, but we distinguish between *theory* as theory and *understanding of theory* as praxis.

30 Qur'an calls itself the Light (4:174).

31 John 1:4

of such propositions implies actions that can only be comprehended in a practical context. For instance, God commands Muhammad³² in his initial experience of receiving revelation to “read³³ in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clinging mass.”³⁴ Abdel Haleem describes this experience as follows:

Muhammad’s own account survives of the extraordinary circumstances of the revelation, of being approached by an angel who commanded him: “Read in the name of your Lord.” When he explained that he could not read, the angel squeezed him strongly, repeating the request twice, and then recited to him the first two lines of the Qur’an.³⁵

The revelatory experience of Muhammad emphasizes the practical nature of understanding the Qur’an, illustrating that comprehension is deeply rooted in action. God’s command to Muhammad to read signifies that his existence is immersed in the understanding of God’s words. This understanding, as a transformative state of being, is itself viewed as a form of praxis. In other words, the imperative verb “read” signifies that Muhammad must engage in praxis to comprehend God’s words; however, understanding these words is itself a form of praxis. In this revelatory experience, divine action is imparted to Muhammad along with the directive to read—a human action necessary for grasping God’s message. Thus, God encourages a dynamic interaction by commanding Muhammad to read in order to enhance Muhammad’s understanding through divine-human action. Consequently, the imperative statement “read in the name of your Lord who created man from a clinging mass” and the declarative statement “your Lord created man from a clinging mass” differ significantly within the context of practical theology.³⁶ Based on Shahab Ahmed’s terminology, this

32 For the sake of brevity, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) will be referred to simply as “Muhammad” in this paper.

33 The Arabic term *iqra’* may be more accurately translated as recite rather than read. Nevertheless, we opt for the translation read in order to maintain consistency with Abdel Haleem’s rendition in the aforementioned quotation.

34 Qur’an, 96:1–2

35 The Qur’an, *Oxford World’s Classics*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford University Press, 2004), xiv.

36 Understanding as praxis, within a hierarchical framework, certainly depends on the personality and spiritual characteristics of the Qur’an’s audience. It is evident that the prophetic experience of understanding—in terms of its depth and intensity—stands incomparable to that of others, while similar experiences may occur for other individuals, albeit at a lesser level of intensity and depth.

represents a form of hermeneutical engagement that involves bringing “one’s Self into the process of truth-making and meaning-making from a source.”³⁷

Another illustrative example is the foundational verse that articulates the fundamental Islamic doctrine of *tawhīd*: “Say, ‘He is Allah, the One.’”³⁸ Commentators have grappled with the word “say” in this verse, as it could be expressed more directly as a declarative sentence: “He is Allah, the One.” However, given the primacy of praxis, say can be understood as an imperative that introduces *tawhīd* in a practical manner. This verse is not merely an informative statement or a simple command from God; it also exemplifies the most effective process of understanding *tawhīd* practically, woven with theoretical implications.

Verses that commence with say—for example, “say, ‘I seek the protection of the Lord of humans’”³⁹ and “say, ‘I seek the protection of the Lord of the daybreak’”⁴⁰—underscore the significance of recitation in the Qur’an as a form of spoken language. Spoken language, as Gadamer asserts, serves as the medium through which human life is fully experienced.⁴¹ Additionally, speech act theory⁴² posits that words serve not only to convey information but also to perform actions. Notably, John Searle’s five categories of illocutionary speech acts highlight the performative power of the term say; the importance of recitation in the Qur’an creates an environment where divine action, in the form of the Qur’an, is disseminated among people through verbal communication and practical manifestations of assertive, commissive, directive, declaratory, and expressive acts.

A final example of the primacy of praxis is found in the Qur’anic verse that explicitly directs theory to be shaped, caused, and governed by theological action:

37 Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 345.

38 Qur’an, 112:1

39 Qur’an, 114:1

40 Qur’an, 113:1

41 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 42–47.

42 For a short review of Searle’s speech act theory see Daniel Vanderveken and Susumu Kubo, “Introduction,” in *Essays in Speech Act Theory* (John Benjamins, 2002), 1–21

Do right and piety⁴³ for [the sake of] Allah; [then] Allah teaches you. And Allah is Knower of all things.⁴⁴

According to this verse, praxis is not only the origin and goal of theory but also the means by which theory is received from God, distinguishing it from all other sources. Other verses reinforce this concept, such as “Who does right and piety for [the sake of] Allah, [then] Allah will appoint a way out for him.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, although the Qur’an serves as guidance for humanity,⁴⁶ “God causes many to err by it (the Qur’an) and many He leads aright by it! But He does not cause to err by it (any) except the transgressors.”⁴⁷ In these verses, the interaction between theory and praxis becomes more pronounced. This interaction is rooted in both human and divine actions (the Qur’an), while the superiority of divine action remains evident.

These examples demonstrate that in both Christopraxis and Qur’anopraxis, theory and praxis are intricately intertwined and capable of developing dialectically in an ascending trajectory. This is particularly evident when one considers that theory, understood as a mode of “understanding,” is itself a form of praxis—one that actively shapes and informs human existence. Therefore, emmanual experiences—understood as divine action and central to both Christopraxis and Qur’anopraxis—are formed and interpreted through the theory-praxis relationship. This connection becomes stronger and deeper as the role of both is enhanced in everyday life.

The relationship between praxis and theory is seen more clearly when viewed through Anderson’s lens that says, “theory can only be discerned through praxis.”⁴⁸ This relationship may further illuminate the discussion of the Qur’an as a text, contrasting its fixed, immutable nature with its multifaceted functionality in the lives of believers and communities. To reconcile this contradiction, we can draw on Barth’s understanding of the word of God, which he views as something addressed to humanity from an external perspective. This perspective entails an irreducible “over-againstness” that restricts and governs our comprehension of God.⁴⁹ He

43 The Arabic *Tāgwa* does not have a straight translation in English. We use the words “right” and “piety” together to approximate the meaning of *Tāgwa*.

44 Qur’an, 2:282

45 Qur’an, 65:2

46 Qur’an, 2:185

47 Qur’an, 2:26

48 Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 21.

49 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, 340.

emphasizes the idea that God exists as a distinct and transcendent being, “over against” humanity, and highlights the fundamental otherness of God in relation to human experience and understanding. Nonetheless, it imposes a non-negotiable demand that shapes and guides human action.

We can, similarly, assert that the reality of the Qur’an (as God’s words) and the deeper layers of its meaning remain inaccessible to the ummah with an ordinary understanding, despite Muhammad’s prophetic experiences. However, the demand for understanding that shapes and guides human action spreads among the ummah through the recitation and repeated engagement with Qur’anic verses in daily prayers and other religious rituals. In other words, praxis provides believers with a means to achieve deeper levels of understanding of the reality of the Qur’an, demonstrating that this journey is endless and continuous. Nevertheless, the highest level of the Qur’an, often referred to as the “Preserved Tablet” (*al-lawh al-mahfūz*), is incomprehensible to anyone but God. What was revealed to Muhammad represents a descended level that can be expressed in words. As one Qur’anic verse states, “Truly We sent it down in the Night of Power.”⁵⁰ Seyyed Hosein Nasr and his co-authors comment on this verse, noting that:

This is understood to be the first stage of revelation from the Preserved Tablet to the lowest heaven, that of this world, or more specifically to the House of Might (*bayt al-‘izzah*), which is in the lowest heaven.⁵¹

Although the verb *anzalnā* in this verse translates to “We sent it down,” it signifies a specific, immediate revelation in contrast to the gradual process of revelation (*tanzīl*). This suggests that during the Night of Power, the entire Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad, after which it was subsequently conveyed gradually over the span of twenty-three years. While there is no definitive consensus regarding the nature of this immediate revelation, one could imagine the possibility of Muhammad comprehending the entirety of the Quran at once, within a meta-spatiotemporal context where the elasticity of time does not constrain the revelation experience, allowing him to intuitively grasp all underlying truths prior to the textual manifestation. On this basis, the ascending path moves from the surface of the Qur’an toward the Preserved Tablet. This journey requires believers to engage in praxis,

50 Qur’an. 97:1

51 Seyyed Hosein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E. B. Lombard, and Mohammed Rustom, *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary* (HarperOne, 2015), 1540.

progressing from lower levels to higher ones while never fully grasping the Preserved Tablet but rather drawing closer to it.

3. Jesus Christ and the Qur'an

Root identifies a neglected aspect of practical theology—the importance and priority of divine action—as a key motivation in the development of Christopraxis:

I argue that practical theology has been magnificent at articulating rich approaches to human action but has been deficient, as I hope to show, in articulating divine action in the same depth.⁵²

Similarly, a parallel deficiency can be noted within Islamic discourse. While there has been significant progress in articulating rich approaches to human action, there remains a lack of depth in articulating divine action, especially in divine action as God's coming to people.

The notion of divine action as God's coming to people varies in form and description between the Lutheran tradition and Islam. In Lutheran thought, this action is performed by the Son—who is the revealed, incarnate Father—acting in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁵³ The Father, in this framework, transcends human experience. As Pete Ward notes:

God is known only through God's own self-revealing. This is seen first and foremost in Jesus Christ.... The reality of God comes before and beyond all expression and all knowing.⁵⁴

In Islam, the reality of God is also not directly experienced by humans; rather, only the manifestations, effects, and revelations of God can be partially understood. Thus, the transcendent manner of God's coming to believers is embodied in the Qur'an.

52 Root, *Christopraxis*, x.

53 Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 24.

54 Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology, Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Baker Academic, 2017), 29.

The role of the Qur'an in Islamic practical theology surpasses that of scripture in Christianity, where it functions more as an intermediary.⁵⁵ Instead, the Qur'an can be likened to Jesus Christ in Christianity, which is why we introduce the term Qur'anopraxis. Therefore, while the words of Muslim scholars such as Shaykh Faheem are entirely accurate, they do not capture the full picture when he states:

It is as clear as day that the Qur'an should not be viewed as a 'mere book' which is to be ceremonially 'recited,' but it is indeed a book which must be 'read' and well understood if we are to gain perspective on the subject matters discussed therein.⁵⁶

This view, while valuable, can be further enriched by recognizing that engaging with the Qur'an is not merely an intellectual exercise—it is a dynamic encounter through which God's words come alive and actively resonate within the lived realities of individuals.

It is understandable that the divine action represented by the coming of the Qur'an to people has often been overlooked by Muslim theologians since Qur'anopraxis is less tangible compared to Christopraxis. Jesus Christ, as the incarnate God, can be perceived and encountered directly. In her recent work, Tanya M. Luhrmann emphasizes making God real is a central aim of practical theologians. She asserts that “the basic claim is this: that God or spirit—the invisible other—must be made real for people, and that this real-making changes those who do it.”⁵⁷ She further explains that “what it means for gods and spirits to feel real is that humans feel a responsiveness, an aliveness.... This is why gods and spirits must be made real.”⁵⁸

55 In Christian terms, scripture is often referred to as the “witness without parallel” to Jesus. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, 563. Moreover, although scripture plays a crucial role in this revelation, its function as a normative, apostolic deposit of truth is essential for a hermeneutic of Christopraxis. See: Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 30.

56 Shaykh Faheem, *The History and Compilation of the Qur'an* (Islamic Lifestyle Solution Publication, 2014), 24.

57 Tanya M. Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others* (Princeton University Press, 2022), xii.

58 Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real*, 157.

Understanding the ministry⁵⁹ of a text, however, is a complex task. To achieve this understanding in the Islamic context, we must examine the nature of the Qur'an. What legitimizes the ministry role of the Qur'an is that it is not merely a written text; it was originally revealed orally, as Nasr mentions:

The Quran was an oral revelation in Arabic first heard by the Prophet and later written down in the Arabic alphabet.⁶⁰

To analyze Nasr's position, let us revisit the verse, "read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clinging mass." The question that emerges from this verse is: what was inscribed, possibly on a tablet, that the angel Gabriel instructed Muhammad to read or recite? In subsequent verses of the same chapter, God asserts that He "taught by the pen,"⁶¹ prompting many Qur'anic commentators to interpret read as interacting with a written source. As Daniel Madigan argues, this source can be understood as an unseen aspect of the *kitb* (book) that is frequently referenced in the Qur'an.

This is the very question that confronted the commentators as they examined the beginning of the text proper: "that is the *kitāb* about which there is no doubt: guidance for the God-fearing." They were puzzled by the use of *dhālika* ("that") rather than *hādihā* ("this") at the beginning of Q 2:2.⁶²

Though commentators have attempted to argue this refers to other chapters of the Qur'an or even the Gospel or Torah, Madigan logically proposes that *dhālika* refers to a reality behind and beyond the visible text "between the

59 I use the term "ministry" in this paper within an Islamic context, drawing conceptually on Root's use of the term in Christian theology. In the preface to *Christopraxis* (p. xii), Root writes: "God is minister. People in my interviews who spoke of evangelical experiences, of encountering divine action, spoke of this action coming to them as ministry—either through the feeling of God's care and healing or through the ministerial activity of another (or themselves to another) that mediated the depth of divine encounter." While his usage emerges from a Christian framework, I adopt a parallel understanding in the Islamic context, where ministry refers to relational, experiential, and often embodied acts through which divine presence and care are mediated in lived human experience.

60 Nasr et al., *The Study Qur'an*, xxiii.

61 Qur'an, 94:4

62 Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 62.

two covers.”^{63, 64} Consequently, the tablet takes on a metaphorical meaning, symbolizing the realm in which the truths of the Qur’an exist, and read connotes contemplate or intuit, allowing one to perceive those other worldly realities. God’s words, then, are initially truths existing in that realm and later made manifest as linguistic terms and sentences. Drawing on Shahab Ahmed’s work, these meta-spatiotemporal truths could be regarded as the “pre-text” components of Islam, in which the universal and eternal truths of revelation existed prior to the textual form known as the Qur’an.⁶⁵

This allegorical understanding of the tablet and pen is further highlighted in Sufi interpretations, especially those of Ibn al-‘Arabī. In his view, the divine truth is manifested in the cosmic order through the intermediary of the Muhammadan truth, with the Muhammadan light serving as the conduit for the flow of divine grace into the realms of beings. Referring to the verse “[swear to] *nūn*, the pen, and what they write,” Ibn al-‘Arabī states: “Then, the pen of will is dipped into the ink of knowledge, and the force of power writes upon the tablet of existence...”⁶⁶

Therefore, what Muhammad was instructed to read were, in fact, the mysteries of existence, drawn from its tablet; this enabled him to attain higher existential levels and greater capacity for divine knowledge. From this perspective, revelation consists of two aspects: the descent of truths and the ascension of Muhammad into the divine realm to grasp and capture those meanings and realities. The Qur’an hints at Muhammad’s ascension when it mentions his heavenly journey:

Immaculate is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* to the *Masjid al-Aqsā*, whose environs We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.⁶⁷

63 The same question arises for other verses, such as 10:1, where the Quran says, “Those are verses of the Wise Scripture.”

64 Nasr employs the term “Cosmic Qur’an” (*al-qurʿān al-tadwīnī*) to denote the pre-textual truths, and the term “written Qur’an” (*al-qurʿān al-tadwīnī*) to refer to the Scripture itself. See Nasr et al., *the Study Qur’an*, xxvi.

65 Ahmed clarifies that by “pre-text revelation,” he is not referring to the Preserved Tablet. However, in light of Madigan’s explanations, the concept of pre-text aligns closely with *dhālika al-kitāb*, which can be interpreted as the Preserved Tablet. See: Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 347.

66 Ibn al-Arabī. *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*. Vol. 1. (Ālibayt li-Ihyā’ al-Torāth Institution, 2002), 3.

67 Qur’an, 17:1

While most commentators interpret the *Masjid al-Harām* and *Masjid al-Aqsā* as references to physical places (two significant mosques for Muslims), a Sufi perspective may uncover a deeper meaning based on the roots of these words. From a Sufi perspective, *Masjid* literally refers to the position of *Sajdah*—the ultimate state of humility, submission, and devotion before God—and *Masjid al-Harām* represents this position, which is forbidden for all other beings to enter. *Masjid al-Aqsā*, in contrast, symbolizes the position to which God carries his servant, Muhammad, to the furthest, even infinite, levels of *Sajdah*, revealing to Muhammad his verses and signs. In this interpretation, the two dimensions of revelation are realized simultaneously, asserting that Muhammad's ascension is indeed an act of God's grace and mercy.⁶⁸

Building on this, the *sunnah* of Muhammad is considered a form of text and can be regarded as a type of the Qur'an; they are, in essence, two faces of the same coin. The *sunnah* is a manifestation of the Qur'an, realized not in written form but through Muhammad's words and actions. From my perspective, the term Qur'an encompasses both texts: the scripture and *sunnah*. Thus, in the Qur'anopraxis, I regard not only the scripture but also Muhammad's *sunnah* as God's action, possessing the same nature but differing manifestations in the scripture and *sunnah* and rooted in the pre-text truths. As a result, the Qur'an possesses qualities that go beyond typical textual expectations. Most notably, the Qur'an is described as a living text since it refers to itself as Spirit.⁶⁹ God's revelation through this living Qur'an, including the written text and Muhammad's *sunnah*, elicits specific actions. The sayings of Muhammad, in particular, introduce the Qur'an as an intercessor,⁷⁰ and the Qur'an itself confirms its healing power.⁷¹ Moreover, recognizing the Qur'an as a living, active source of guidance and mercy⁷²

68 Although this process is dedicated to Muhammad at its highest level, the path is not closed to others; there is no obstacle to experience this, albeit on a lower and less potent level than Muhammad's experience. Indeed, the truth of the Qur'an exists along an expansive and infinite spectrum; its praxis varies depending on the capacity and ethical development of its audience.

69 Qur'an, 42:52. Some commentaries argue that "Spirit" is Gabriel in this verse. Some others, however, believe that it mentions the Qur'an. Regarding the grammar and linguistic considerations, it is highly likely that the second one is true.

70 Muhammad Ibn 'Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan (Traditions)*, Vol. 4. (Dār al-Fikr Publications, 1982), 238.

71 Qur'an, 17:82

72 Qur'an, 31:2–3

illuminates the theological understanding of God's action through the agency of the Qur'an and the concrete experiences arising from its praxis.⁷³

Therefore, similar to Luhrmann's observations in a Christian context that emphasize the need for gods and spirits to be made real, the Qur'an in the Islamic tradition must be regarded not only as a holy text but also as a living entity embodying all its described properties and attributes. The Qur'an, written or realized by Muhammad, represents the highest manifestation of God and the sublime expression of God's word. Interestingly, it refers to Jesus as the Word of God,⁷⁴ highlighting a significant similarity between the Qur'an and Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ Regardless of the various commentaries and interpretations regarding the nature of this "Word," it serves as a common point for understanding both Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis across these two traditions.

4. Emmanual Experiences

Religious experience⁷⁶ serves as the backbone of practical theology in the contemporary contexts of both Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis. Specifically, emmanual experience refers to an understanding of God's ongoing work in a believer's life and God's coming to people, emphasizing "the centrality of the commitment to a God who comes to us."^{77, 78}

73 Although this paper acknowledges that the term Qur'an encompasses both scripture and the *sunnah*, the following discussion and examples primarily focus on the scriptural form of the Qur'an rather than the *sunnah*. This is because the reported experiences of God's coming to people are predominantly discussed in relation to scripture.

74 Qur'an, 4:171; 3:45

75 See John 1:1. This is referred to as the "Two Words Analogy," where both Christians and Muslims avoid a direct inquiry and instead draw a parallel, comparing Muhammad to Mary and the Qur'an to Jesus, the Incarnate Word. For further insights and alternative perspectives, see Axel M. Oaks Takacs, "The Prophet Muhammad Between Lived Religion and Elite Discourse: Rethinking and Decolonizing Christian Assessments of the *uswa hasana* Through Comparative Theological Aesthetics," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 34, no. 3 (2023): 245–84.

76 The term religious experience is an ambiguous one with a wide range of extensions. I use it to mean emmanual experience, which I will explain further.

77 Root, *Christopraxis*, xi.

78 Root argues that many individuals have had concrete, lived, and real experiences. He focuses on experiences where individuals encounter Jesus Christ, dedicating

The moments of emmanual experiences often involve revelation, enlightenment, and transformation, significantly impacting the individual's faith and worldview. However, despite the prevalence of such experiences in everyday Muslims' lives, Muslim scholars have rarely provided a systematic framework for understanding and interpreting them within Islamic theology. While the Qur'an emphasizes personal piety, reflection, and spiritual growth—and numerous Islamic traditions underscore the importance of spiritual experiences—there is a notable gap in scholarly discourse regarding their systematic analysis. This gap highlights the urgent need for further exploration of emmanual experiences within the Islamic tradition as they hold profound implications for understanding faith and spirituality among Muslim believers.

Throughout Islamic history, many believers have encountered profound spiritual experiences through engaging with the Qur'an and interacting with fellow believers. God's coming to people is manifested primarily through religious experiences, which may occur in Islamic contexts as general recitations of the Qur'an—spoken by individuals or conveyed through the text itself—or as otherworldly sounds encountered by specific people in particular situations. Given the fundamental Islamic belief that the Qur'an is composed of God's direct words,⁷⁹ every form of recitation can be understood as a kind of divine action—one of many ways through which God interacts with believers. When divine action is understood as God's coming to people, all these expressions of the Qur'an can be seen as tangible manifestations of that encounter.

These manifestations of the Qur'an can be understood as emmanual experiences that share the characteristic and nature of religious experiences through the Qur'an. Muhammad's experience in the Cave of Ḥirā' exemplifies a pivotal moment of divine encounter that shaped the course of religious history. It underscores the themes of revelation and the transmission of divine guidance to humanity, central to Islamic faith traditions.

One of the most significant emmanual experiences in the Lutheran tradition occurred in Martin Luther's own life through his recitation of scripture and direct encounter with it. While this experience is not unique, it bears a notable similarity to the Qur'anic encounters that take place in

significant portions of his work to reporting interviews with those who have had emmanual experiences. See Root, *Christopraxis*, 42–51.

79 Some prominent Muslim intellectuals, such as Abu Zaid and Soroush, reject this idea. See Ferry Muhammad Syah Siregar, *Nasr Ḥamid Abu Zaid on Tafṣīr, Ta'wīl, Qur'anic Hermeneutic Discourses* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

an Islamic context. It shows that in the Lutheran tradition, God's coming to people can occur not only through the physical presence of Jesus but also through the Bible as the Word of God, paralleling the Islamic experience. For many Lutheran believers, much like Muslims, reading the Bible transcends mere intellectual exercise; it becomes a profound spiritual encounter. Passages resonate deeply with their current life situations, offering insight and direction. This phenomenon is often described as the Holy Spirit working through the scriptures to communicate directly with the reader.

Luther's "Tower Experience" occurred while he was a monk at the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg, studying the Bible—particularly the book of Romans—and grappling with concepts of righteousness and divine justice. Troubled by the belief that he could never be righteous enough to earn God's favor, he eventually understood the principle of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). He realized that righteousness is granted by God through faith in Jesus Christ, not earned through good works. This revelation was transformative, becoming a cornerstone of his theology.⁸⁰

God comes to Luther in this emmanual experience, affirming a profound commitment between him and God. Though Luther did not report a direct vision of Jesus Christ, this experience occurs through his engagement with scripture and is akin to an encounter with Christ himself. Such moments of divine revelation can lead to significant life changes, fostering renewed dedication to spiritual practices, ethical living, and community service. The Bible becomes a living document, actively shaping the lives and hearts of those who engage with it.

In the Lutheran context, the significance of experience is evident in the models proposed by Browning and Anderson. Browning positions experience at the core of his compelling and critical model, while in Anderson's revision, experience is replaced with a concept of Christopraxis that emphasizes the presence of Christ in the lives of believers. He refers to experience as the praxis of encountering Christ, which is already active in the believers' lives.⁸¹

Luther's experience parallels my concept of Qur'anopraxis, where one form of emmanual experience arises through encounters with the holy scriptures that serve as a conduit for individuals to connect with the divine. When believers read and meditate on the scriptures, they often report a deep sense of God's presence and guidance. This engagement enables them

80 Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 71–74.

81 Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 30.

to experience God's wisdom, love, and power in an intimate way, and it brings profound peace, comfort, and clarity that reinforces their faith and commitment to living according to God's will.

While the specifics of Luther's and Muhammad's experiences differ in their theological and historical contexts, both illustrate the profound impact of divine encounters on individual believers and the broader religious communities they inspired. As Luhrmann notes, the possibility of emmanual experience is plausible, and its reality cannot be dismissed.⁸²

That, after all, is the point of experimental evangelical⁸³ spirituality: to experience God—an external invisible presence—interacting with one through phenomena one would ordinarily interpret as internal and self-generated.⁸⁴

While this is a humble, minimalist position, it implies a theoretical framework for interpreting encounters with the specific reality of God coming to people. To fully understand these experiences, we must clarify our approach to reality and determine what we mean when we assert that “evangelical experiences are real.” Inspired by Browning and Root, I adopt the perspective of Gadamerian hermeneutics to interpret evangelical experiences, while using Anderson's insights to provide a lens for exploring the reality of these encounters.

4.1. *Gadamerian Hermeneutics*

Although Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics and reality is situated outside the realms of theology and religion, I draw on his insights in a religious context to elucidate the concepts of Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis. Following Root's interpretation, I adapt Gadamer's framework to explore how these practices engage with divine action and the experiences of individuals within their respective faith traditions. This application highlights

82 Tanya M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 227–66. She argues that the people who have religious experiences are not crazy, and their experiences are possibly real.

83 To maintain the exact wording of the direct quotation, the term “evangelical” is used.

84 Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real*, 69.

the relevance of Gadamerian hermeneutics in understanding the dynamic interplay between textual interpretation and lived religious experiences.

Martin Heidegger notably shifted the focus of hermeneutics away from a primary concern with the methods or foundations of research in the arts and humanities. Instead, he employed hermeneutics in his inquiries into what he called the “being” or “existentiality” of human existence.⁸⁵ Building on this foundation, Gadamer’s hermeneutics center on existential praxis; this focus makes his perspective particularly suitable for explaining emmanual experiences. He emphasizes that understanding is always situated within a specific historical and cultural context, and the interpreter’s background significantly influences their interpretation. This context must be considered in the process of understanding.⁸⁶

Gadamer also emphasizes that understanding is a dialogical process. It involves a conversation between the interpreter and the text or subject, where meaning is negotiated and constructed through interaction. Within this framework, sublime praxis emerges as a dialectical experience, enhancing human capacity to discover existents in specific situations. These discoveries occur within historical contexts and traditions; however, it is important to note that in Gadamerian hermeneutics, history and tradition do not necessarily refer to events long past. Instead, Gadamer highlights the nature of human experiences that are perceived within the flow of time and connected to the past, regardless of how long ago it was. It is essential to recognize that the object—whether Christ or the Qur’an—can never be fully grasped due to its ongoing “effective history.”⁸⁷

The idea of being situated within a stream of time as a fundamental aspect of human experience makes Gadamerian hermeneutics particularly relevant for interpreting experiences related to Qur’anopraxis. From this perspective, a written tradition becomes contemporaneous with the present moment, allowing awareness to connect with that tradition. This process enables the reader to move beyond reliance on oral and ephemeral events, expanding their horizons of discovery through the history encapsulated in the written text. This interaction not only activates a sacred text like

85 Theodore George, “Hermeneutics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia Philosophy* (Winter 2020 edition), Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, eds., <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/#:~:text=Heidegger%20defines%20inquiry%20into%20the,in%20the%20arts%20and%20humanities>.

86 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 240.

87 In Lutheran emmanual experiences, the presence of Christ is engaged dialectically with the experienter, who discovers Christ according to their own capacity.

the Qur'an within its effective history but also facilitates a metatextual experience that reveals deeper layers of meaning. On this basis, in Qur'anopraxis the reader engages not merely with the text itself but with the divine speaker behind it.

Gadamerian hermeneutics also introduces the concept of the “fusion of horizons,” a phrase that frequently appears in Browning’s work.⁸⁸ The term horizon denotes the range of vision or perspective that an individual brings to a text, idea, or situation. Gadamer asserts that understanding is achieved not by simply adopting another’s perspective but by merging one’s own horizon with that of the other. This fusion leads to a richer and more comprehensive grasp of the subject being studied.⁸⁹

Browning employs this notion to integrate the horizons of religious traditions and human ethical actions, shaping a practical theology that centers on ethics as the essence of practical wisdom. However, when constructing Root’s Christopraxis and what I term Qur'anopraxis, Gadamer’s framework proves more advantageous than Browning’s. The concept of horizon fusion emerges when Gadamer denies a strict subject-object relationship between the experiencer and the experienced.⁹⁰ Instead, the experiencer and the experienced engage in a questioning dialectic, where the horizon of the experienced becomes accessible, allowing the experiencer to expand their own horizon. This process results in a true fusion of horizons. The term expansion indicates that the experiencer does not abandon their horizon; rather, they achieve a richer, deeper understanding of themselves through this unique fusion of horizons. Consequently, experiencing Christ or the Qur'an—essentially, the fusion of human and divine horizons—leads to a profound discovery of the self that resonates with the divine horizon.

4.2. *Types and Examples of Emmanual Experiences*

In the proposed Christopraxis and Qur'anopraxis framework, emmanual experiences can be classified into two types. The first, termed first-order emmanual experiences, occurs through a supernatural or meta-mundane

88 Gadamer first encountered the concept of horizon in Husserl’s writings where it referred to the limitations that restrict meaning. However, he reinterpreted this concept through his own hermeneutic approach, shifting from an opposition of horizons to a fusion of them.

89 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 268–70.

90 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284.

event. These experiences are distinctly otherworldly. In contrast, the second-order emmanual experiences are characterized by a more natural acquaintance with the divine. Though these experiences may appear ordinary, they represent a transformative encounter with God, orchestrated by divine intent to alter the individual profoundly.

Both types of emmanual experiences share adjectives such as concrete, lived, and real; both facilitate a deep spiritual transformation. The key distinction lies in their manifestation and the degree of supernatural involvement. First-order experiences often arise unexpectedly and marked by God's direct intervention, such as meeting Jesus Christ, hearing an otherworldly voice reciting Qur'an, or witnessing a supernatural sign during spiritual contemplation. Second-order experiences, conversely, are typically more mundane occurrences, e.g., hearing someone read the Bible or the Qur'an aloud or reflecting on the text personally.

Most of the interviews that Root presents in his work, *Christopraxis*, refer to second-order emmanual experiences.⁹¹ One specific emmanual experience that Root highlights is the concept of being present with others in community. He illustrates this through stories of individuals who engage deeply with those around them, fostering genuine relationships that reflect Christ's love. He describes, for example, scenarios in which youth leaders or mentors invest time in young people's lives—not just to impart knowledge but to share in their joys and struggles. These relational dynamics create a space for transformative encounters with God.

Another significant emmanual experience involves the act of suffering within a community. Root emphasizes how shared experiences of grief and hardship can deepen relational bonds and foster a stronger understanding of God's presence. He shares stories of congregations coming together to support members facing significant challenges, such as illness or loss. In these moments, the church acts as a support system, embodying Christ's love and compassion. This collective experience of suffering not only provides comfort but also transforms how individuals perceive God—shifting from an abstract concept to a tangible presence felt through the love and care of others. This idea underscores that God is encountered not only in personal

91 Root does not explicitly name the first and second orders of emmanual experiences. His criteria for categorizing these experiences focus on external elements, such as presence among others and the act of suffering. However, to align with the purpose of this paper, I will present my own categorization.

devotion but also in the shared life of the community, where love and empathy are manifest expressions of Christ's work.⁹²

To illustrate first- and second-order emmanual experiences in the Islamic context, I will present one example from each category involving well-known figures, thereby ensuring credibility and minimizing potential bias from personal interviews.⁹³ One notable instance is that of Bahā' al-Dīn Khorramshāhi, a prominent Iranian writer and translator. He recounts his experience as follows:

I bought a pair of soccer shoes with a strong, hard tip. One night, my sons wanted me to go out with them to play. Although I was busy, I agreed. When I came out of my room, I noticed what I thought was a pillow under the blanket in the hall. I decided to kick it to test my new shoes. As I ran toward it, a voice resonated in my heart, reciting: "[Believers] are those who avoid vain deeds."⁹⁴ I had never memorized this verse; it was repeated in a heavenly tone distinct from my own. The voice halted me, and to my shock, I realized that the "pillow" was my youngest son, Ḥāfīz, who had fallen asleep under the blanket. Had I kicked it, I would have harmed my own child.⁹⁵

This exemplifies what Root refers to as an emmanual experience, substituting Christ with the Qur'an. In this profound moment, Khorramshāhi received a direct divine message through an extraordinary revelation of the Qur'an, reflecting a fusion of his horizon with that of the text.

The second example involves Dr. Gary Miller, a mathematics and logic lecturer at Toronto University. His transformative experience occurred in 1977. He initially approached the Qur'an with the expectation that it would be nothing more than an antiquated text, authored fourteen centuries ago—likely filled, he assumed, with references to deserts and archaic cultural

92 Root, *Christopraxis*, 42–51. Since the interviews and explanations are presented in his book, I will not report them here.

93 Since this research introduces the Qur'anopraxis for the first time, I preferred to use an analytic-descriptive method. Analyzing the results of my interviews using the method of grounded theory will be published in another paper.

94 Qur'an, 23:3

95 This is a brief report of what Khorramshāhi said in his interview. The complete interview is in Persian. Khorramshāhi, "A Miracle for Bahā' al-Dīn Khorramshāhi, Translator of the Holy Qur'an," *aparat.com*, Tehran, July 2, 2014, 6 min., 10 sec. <https://www.aparat.com/v/uCP8X>

norms.⁹⁶ However, he was astonished by what he discovered. Compelled by curiosity, he began reading the Qur'an more carefully, intent on finding inconsistencies or errors. Instead, he was profoundly struck by a verse—Sūrat al-Nisā' (4:82)—which states: “Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an? If it had been from any other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.”⁹⁷ Commenting on the Qur'an's remarkable style, Dr. Miller notes its extraordinary quality: the Qur'an not only conveys specific knowledge but does so while explicitly asserting that such knowledge was previously unknown to the reader. This distinctive feature, he argues, is unmatched in any other text and reflects a unique and compelling literary and epistemic character.⁹⁸

While this experience does not involve direct supernatural sights or sounds, it indicates a significant discovery of divine presence and action. Through the Qur'an, Miller underwent an existential transformation, expanding his horizon to align with that of the text. His reflective engagement with the Qur'an became the source of his understanding and action, showcasing the dynamic interaction between the experiencer and the experienced.

Conclusion

In examining emmanual experiences through the lenses of Christoph Praxis and Qur'anopraxis, we uncover a rich tapestry of divine encounters that transcend cultural and religious boundaries. Both first-order and second-order experiences illustrate the profound ways in which individuals engage with the divine, whether through extraordinary supernatural events or through everyday moments of reflection and community interaction.

The integration of Gadamerian hermeneutics enables us to appreciate these experiences as deeply situated within the historical and cultural contexts of the believers, emphasizing the dialogical nature of interpretation. This perspective highlights the fluidity of reality and acknowledges the multiplicity of viewpoints, fostering a more nuanced understanding of faith that celebrates both individual and communal dimensions.

96 Gary Miller, *The Amazing Quran* (Abul Qasim Publishing House, 1992), 3.

97 Miller, *The Amazing Quran*, 11.

98 For more information, see: <https://blog.une.edu.au/new-england-muslims/2017/11/06/gary-miller-the-man-who-challenged-the-quran/>

Importantly, this exploration encourages interreligious dialogue by illuminating the shared quest for the divine across traditions. The notion of a transcendent unity of religions reveals that, while doctrines may differ, the underlying pursuit of truth and connection with the divine resonates universally. This invites us to engage with one another in meaningful ways, seeking common ground in our experiences of God's coming to people.

As we continue to explore these emmanual experiences, we open ourselves to profound insights and a deeper understanding of each other's faith narratives. By fostering an environment of mutual respect and dialogue, we not only enrich our own spiritual journeys but also contribute to a broader conversation that celebrates the diverse ways in which humanity seeks the divine. In this light, our work emphasizes the transformative power of these encounters, encouraging all to pursue deeper connections with God and with one another.

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