A CHRISTIAN KURDISH POLITICAL THEOLOGY
(CKPT)

by

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ABSTRACT

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The five practices of John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), e.g. ethics, economics, equality, sociology and dialog, provide a useful framework for the construction of a Christian Kurdish political theology (CKPT), if presented in a language that takes into consideration the Kurdish Islamic context. The first practice of reconciliation is of special importance, because Kurdistan has witnessed several massacres over the last two centuries. Since some of these were also directed against Christian communities, it represents a special challenge to the Christians to initiate such a process of reconciliation. Another aspect of the first practice emphasizes that the concept of God serves as the underlying principle for a moral theology, which is a concept well understood also in Islam. The second practice of Yoder establishes the relevance of economics for a CKPT, which could be modeled within the Christian communities especially in the context of NGOs. The third practice stresses the principle of equality as a *sine qua non* for CKPT, because of the impasse of Islamic theology, which does not transcend the concept of dhimmitude and extreme nationalism which resists the concept of ethnic equality. In order to guarantee equality, the concept of *Sharia* and national laws need to be perfected by a constitution that assures equality for all and maintains a non-violent approach. The fourth practice argues for a dynamic citizenship, which is developed in coexistence, where everyone can be both governor and governed and advocates for the empowerment of both men and women. The last practice emphasizes that CKPT needs to propagate principles of dialog that require participants to even listen to the adversary. This dialog needs to be portrayed within the Christian churches, in ecumenical deliberations, interfaith talks, but also in political and economic consultations that start *ad infra* among the tribes, parties and religions, in order to develop the equality and dignity of all individuals, and should then continue *ad extra* in a dialog with the Sunnite Turkish and Shiite Iranian neighbors, in order to reach a meaningful political and economic *modus vivendi*. 
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**INTRODUCTION**
Biographical Rapprochement to Topic

My interest to construct a Christian Kurdish political theology springs from a deep desire to develop a viable *modus vivendi* for the people of Kurdistan, who have been striving for liberty and peace being sandwiched between the two Islamic power blocs of Sunnite Turkey and Shiite Iran. Growing up in the city of Saqqez in Kurdistan, Iran, my family adhered to the classical Sunni Islamic tradition, which put us in the Iranian Shiite context into a double sociological predicament: My family was of the stock of the non-Shiite Kurdish people that spoke Farsi, as the official language of Iran, but Sorani as their Kurdish mother tongue. Because of family members and friends, who followed the older Kurdish (Sufism) and Iranian (Zoroastrianism) traditions, I came to understand early on in my life to respect and live together with adherents of different religious backgrounds. What put me eventually, however, over against the official position of the government, was not religion or language, but my political affiliation with the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party). Some of these frictions would force me in the end to leave the Province of Kurdistan in Iran and to flee into the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan of Iraq. During my time there with the party, I got in contact with Evangelical relief organizations from the US and became interested in Christianity. After I had taken the decision to become a follower of the practices of Christ, I became more and more interested in Christianity and decided to flee to Europe in order to study theology. During my studies at the European Theological Seminary in Germany, and especially at Lee University, USA, I was introduced to the discipline of political theology. When studying John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), who emphasizes that the church must be active in politics and penetrate society with Christian principles (emergent tradition), I was reminded of some of the early thinkers of Islamic political theology that had a similar outlook on the intertwinement of religion and politics. This sparked within me the desire to construct a
Christian Kurdish political theology that is informed by the practices of Yoder on the one hand, but does also take into consideration the Islamic context.

**Defining Christian Kurdish Political Theology (CKPT)**

In order to clarify for the reader the various aspects of a Christian Kurdish political theology, I want to, by way of introduction, define the four crucial elements of such a theology as reflected in the thesis title: “Christian,” “Kurdish,” “political,” and “theology.”

“Christian”

Today, the majority of contemporary Christian political theologies can be categorized in two traditions of the dominant and the emergent kind. The former holds the state as the agent of political activity and thereby criticizes the status quo of the society through the lens of justice in the Christian tradition. The latter resists the idea of the state as the primary agent of political activity and advocates for the Christian church to present itself as a political body with an alternative vision of a good life.

Because of a similar starting point of Yoder and some Islamic thinkers, who consider the notion of God as essential for politics, I want to construct a deliberate Christian Kurdish political theology that is informed on the one hand by the five Christian practices of Yoder, but on the other hand takes into consideration also the Islamic context of Kurdistan. This Christian Kurdish political theology will be constructed according to the five practices of Yoder, but will at the same time also attempt to bridge the gap between the two traditions of Christianity and Islam. Such a CKPT will also serve as save-guard against the impasses of Islamic political theology and extreme nationalism. To construct such a deliberate Christian Kurdish political theology may at first glance be surprising, because Christians are such a small minority in Kurdistan and western political theologies also appear to be of limited
relevance for the region of the Middle East in general and Kurdistan in particular. Western political theologians, who perceive politics in relation to globalization, are usually not too concerned with the concept of nation-states nor Islamic political thought, which is, however, of great importance to the Kurdish context. Nevertheless, a well-known, yet somewhat narrow Middle Eastern nationalistic theology, like Naim Ateek’s *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, who develops a Palestinian liberation theology over against the State of Israel seems to be, though Middle Eastern in outlook, even of less help.¹ Such a Palestinian political theology, although constructed in the context of the Middle East and by a leading Christian thinker of the region, is of little relevance for the development of a Christian Kurdish political theology, since it does not address issues relevant for Kurdistan, but is explicitly directed against the State of Israel and is employing a neo-orthodox system of thought propagating a replacement theology that suggests that the promises of God were transferred from Israel to the church. On the other hand, the principles of a Christian western political theology, like the practices of Yoder, if they are contextualized to the Islamic region and speak to the Kurdish aspirations of nationhood, can be extremely helpful. While some may caution that this is stretching Christian theology beyond limits, Smith encourages such openness and notes that the gospel includes a transcultural calling and needs to be essentially contextual.² Also O’Donovan, when stressing the importance of contextualization, insists that “to be alert to the signs of the times is a Gospel requirement, laid upon us as upon Jesus’ first hearers.”³ Yoder, in his book *Body Politics*, challenges thus the church to rediscover its place as a political body. The church as a *polis* has the characteristic of a social entity and thus any


bi-polarization of the sacred and the secular, separating the church from politics must be rejected. Arguing for his position, Yoder redefines five practices of the Early Christian Church for the contemporary Christian communities and notes that these practices contain social aspects that can “offer a paradigm for the life of a larger society.”

He thus opens a window for the church and puts forth the challenge to venture out beyond the narrow Christian context, because unfortunately, most of the time, Western political theologies do not offer great insights beyond the Christian context. The Body of Christ – though in theory understood as a universal body – most of the time remained in practice confined to the Christian context and did not develop a political theology that convincingly addressed non-Christian nations and societies. Therefore, I want to take the challenge of Yoder seriously and propose, despite the differences between the two traditions of Christianity and Islam, to utilize the five practices of Yoder’s *Body Politics*, to construct a deliberate Christian Kurdish political theology that can bridge the gap to Islamic societies in general and to Kurdish society in particular.

“Kurdish”

As an additional introductory task, it will be important to look at some basic background information on the Kurdish people in general and on the Christian presence in Kurdistan in particular. According to McDowall, there are probably in the order of 24-27 million Kurds living in the Middle East and beyond. About half of the populations of the Kurds, numbering at least 13 Million, live in Turkey. There are about 4.2 million living in Iraq and 5.7 million in Iran. More than one million live in Syria, 700,000 in Europe, mainly in

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5 Yoder, *Body Politics*, x.
Germany, and 400,000 in Armenia and Azarbaijan.\textsuperscript{6} Ferdinand Hennerbichler suggests that there are even 35 million Kurds living in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{7} The same number is also put forth by the “Kurdish Project.”\textsuperscript{8}

The oldest extant Kurdish texts can only be dated back to the 8/9th century CE.\textsuperscript{9} The Saljugs first used the term “Kurdistan” for the land of the Kurds in the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{10} Nevertheless, \textit{kur}, from which is derived Kurda or Kurdi, meaning “mountain region” or “mountain people,” is an ancient term that goes back to the beginning of the historical period,  

\textsuperscript{7} Ferdinand Hennerbichler, \textit{Die Herkunft der Kurden} (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 7.  
\textsuperscript{8} http://thekurdishproject.org/kurdistan-map, accessed on March 15, 2019.  
\textsuperscript{10} McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 6.
indicating that the Kurdish people have been an *ethnos* with a long history.\textsuperscript{11} *Nomen est omen*, the most prominent geophysical feature of Kurdistan is its mountainousness. “In contiguous Kurdistan, as well as in the many far-flung Kurdish settlements, mountains are the single most important natural phenomenon, and they have shaped the Kurdish history, people, tradition, and culture.”\textsuperscript{12} In fact, a famous Kurdish proverb states “the Kurds have no friends but the mountains.”\textsuperscript{13} Izady outlines the geographic perimeter of the Kurdish homeland and specifies that “Kurdistan at present is composed primarily of the area of the central and northern Zagros Mountains, the eastern Taurus and Pontus mountains, as well as the northern Amanus mountains. There are also two large detached Kurdish enclaves in northeastern Iran, in the province of Khurasan, and in north-central Anatolia, neighboring the Turkish capital of Ankara.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Hennerbichler, *Die Herkunft der Kurden*, 191.


\textsuperscript{14} Izady, *The Kurds*, 13.
After the Second World War, the Kurdish homeland has been divided up among five states, “with the largest portions of Kurdish territory in Turkey (43%), followed by Iran (31%), Iraq (18%), Syria (6%), and the former Soviet Union (2%).”¹⁶ These countries have at


¹⁶ Izady, The Kurds, 3.
various stages subdivided Kurdistan into various administrative units and provinces. In central Kurdistan the name has been preserved in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan of Iraq and in western Iran in the Province of Kurdistan.

Neighbors of Kurdistan\(^{17}\)

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Ad infra, “Kurdistan has been divided historically, and on a socioeconomic, cultural, and political basis, into five major subdivisions: southern Kurdistan centered around the city of Kirmanshah, central Kurdistan centered around Arbil, eastern Kurdistan around Mahabad,
northern Kurdistan around Bayazid, and western Kurdistan around Diyarbakir.” It is noteworthy that “in addition to these five major subdivisions, there are of course also two large, detached Kurdish enclaves in Khurasan and central Anatolia.

Because of the absence of an independent political state, Kurdistan is thus defined in this paper as “the territory in which Kurds constitute an ethnic majority.” In spite of the fact that this leaves of course some room for interpretation, such a definition is still helpful as a basic working hypothesis. It is also noteworthy that Kurdistan maintains borders with three other major ethnic groups of the Middle East: the Arabs to the south, the Persians to the east, and the Turks to the west.

Izady and Hennerbichler, have attempted to established a coherent picture for the origins of the Kurdish ethnos as far back as the Bronze Age, providing such an excellent historical backdrop for the most decisive period of Kurdish history, the process of aryanization. Aryanization and its development took place after the “initial process of unification during the Neolithic agricultural period, the Halafic culture period, and the Hurrite migration, which represented initial episodes of homogenization in the history of Kurdistan.” This period began with the migration of Aryan nomads to the Zagros Mountains and also the surrounding regions between 1200-900 BCE, and came to its completion around 700 BCE, resulting in the domination of most of the Middle East by the Aryans.

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20 Izady, *The Kurds*, 1-5.
With the ascent of Alexander the Great and the beginning of the Hellnistic Empire in the 4th century BCE, the ancient history came to its end and the classical period was inaugurated. According to Izady, by the end of the third century BCE, the Seleucid Empire, which was established by one of the generals of Alexander the Great, lost most of its eastern domain to Parthia. Because of the existence of many similarities between the Kurds and the Parthians, many Kurds either struck an alliance with the enlarging Parthian Federation or were seized by this expanding Federation starting in the third century BCE. Eventually, the eastern two-thirds of Kurdistan were thus located within the Parthian Federation. 25 One of these local kingdoms, the Kingdom of Adiabene, with its capital at Arbel (modern Arbil), merits special attention here. In the first century BCE, and as the result of a wave of conversions of its aristocracy to Judaism in an initial step and the majority of the kingdom’s population in a second wave, close connections with the Jewish population of the Holy Land were established. Thus, during the Roman conquest of Judea and Samaria, it was the Kingdom of Adiabene that sent supplies and troops to their rescue and even partook in the hopeless defense of Galilee.26 Queen Helena showered presents upon Jerusalem, and took her sons there to be educated. Her remains were sent to Jerusalem for burial.27 By the 4th century CE, however, Adiabene had become largely Christian.28 According to Izady, the term Adiabene is the latinized rendering of the extortion of the Kurdish tribal name Hadhaban. In the third century BCE, this populous Kurdish tribe from the regions of the southern Zagros mountains had moved into central Kurdistan and expeditiously established their political power in the area and appointed Arbela as their capital, “imparting for a time their own ethnic

25 Izady, The Kurds, 35.


28 Izady, The Kurds, 35.
name unto the city.”29 In the Islamic era, the original name, Arbela, was ultimately restored. “Despite their eventual eclipse by the Sassanid Persians in the 3rd century CE, some remnants of the Hadhabanis were still found in the southern Zagros in the late medieval era and they rose again to power in the 11th century CE, giving rise to the Ayyubid dynasty of King Saladin.”30

Since the advent of Islam in the seventh century, the vigorous Kurdish emigrants ascended to the leadership of various kingdoms and became rulers even outside Kurdistan proper.31 “In fact, this exodus shaped the course of Muslim history in the area from Khurasan to the Mediterranean coast for three centuries, beginning with the 10th.”32 Though the eastern Iranian regions in “Central Asia” and “Afganistan/Sistan” were under the dominion of the “Persian-speaking Soghdian dynasties,” the western regions and also the “Fertile Crescent,” were ruled by several “independent Kurdish dynasties.”33 During the period from the 10-12th century the Kurds ruled and defended the Islamic heartlands against the Byzantines, the Rus, and finally the Crusaders.34 The most important of these Kurdish dynasties were the Buwayhids and the Ayyubids.35 Bursting out of Kurdistan to recapture the Holy Land from the Crusaders, the founder of the Ayyubid Empire, King Saladin (1137-1193 CE), defeated Richard the Lionhearted of England and went on to expand his domain to occupy, in addition to Kurdistan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, the Holy Land, Arabia, and

29 Izady, The Kurds, 35.
30 Izady, The Kurds, 36.
31 Izady, The Kurds, 42.
32 Izady, The Kurds, 43.
33 Izady, The Kurds, 43.
34 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 22-23.
Yemen. Saladin, who defeated the Crusaders at the Horns of Hattin, just above the Sea of Galilee, in 1187 CE, was born in Tikrit (ironically the hometown of Saddam Hussein) and was considered to be the greatest Kurdish leader ever. The Ayyubids ruled from 1169 CE through the end of the 15th century.

After the 15th century Kurdistan witnessed a decline, which would only be reversed with the coming of new ideas from the West, as we will see later on in our discussion. A vigorous Kurdish society that had flourished during the initial Islamic periods evolved into one of the most backward and desolated societies in the region. There were two primary causes of this decline: 1) the division of the Middle East into two warring empires, Persians and the Ottomans, with their line of fire being the heartland of Kurdistan, and more importantly, 2) the utter economic isolation of Kurdistan resulting from the epoch-making shift in international trade routes.

While there has been done much remarkable research as far as the history of the Kurdish People is concerned, there is little information available on the Kurdish Christian presence in the region. Sources for a Kurdish Church History are almost non-existent, in spite of the fact that we know of the famous Kingdom of Adiabene, which had first become Jewish and then later on Christian, during the fourth century CE. But even for the period of

36 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 22-23.
38 Izady, The Kurds, 45-49.
39 Izady, The Kurds, 49.
40 Izady, The Kurds, 49.
the late Kingdom of Adiabene that had accepted Christianity many questions remain: Which segment of the kingdom accepted Christianity? What was the ethnic identity of these Christians? How many of them actually were Kurdish Christians?

What we do know with some certainty, however, is the fact that when the Sassanid capital fell in 636 CE to the Arab invasion, about half of the population of the Sassanid Empire was Christian, 75% of which belonged to the Church of the East (20% were monophysites of the West Syrian Church and 5% Melkites). Because of this significant growth of Christianity during the Byzantine and Sassanid Period in Mesopotamia and the region of the Kurdish heartland, it is reasonable to assume that, in spite of the fact that we have only few sources that actually report the conversion of Kurds to Christianity, there were many Kurdish converts that actually joined the Christian faith but where eventually absorbed by the sea of surrounding Christians, particularly the Syrian churches and the Armenian church. As a result of the expansion of Islam, Christianity in Kurdistan has seen extreme isolation that has led the small Kurdish churches to renounce their national identity as Kurds and forged a new identity with the surrounding Christian communities. “The Syrian Christians of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan became a Neo-Aramaic-speaking amalgam of Kurds and Semitic peoples who have retained the old language.” This changing of identity, however, did not include every Kurdish Christian community, for Masudi, the Medieval Muslim historian reports in his writings that there were Kurdish Christians in the tenth

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42 Ch. Baumer, *Fruehes Christentum zwischen Euphrat und Jangtse. Eine Zeitreise entlang der Seidenstrasse zur Kirche des Ostens* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 2005), 205, 283: During the 10.-14. century CE the Church of the East numbered 8 Million adherents, which represented 15% of Christianity; today, both East Syrians and West Syrians together make up only one Million adherents.


century.\textsuperscript{46} In 1272, also Marco Polo reports that, “in the mountainous parts (of Mosul) there is a race of people named Kurds, some of whom are Christians of the Nestorian and Jacobite sects, and others Muhammadan.”\textsuperscript{47} This is an important reference to Christian Kurds, as Marco Polo earlier in his work had reported already on the non-Kurdish Christian population of the region.\textsuperscript{48}

Blincoe notes that after the decree of 1437 CE by Pope Origen IV, the Catholic Church sent many missionaries to Kurdistan and declared that the Church of the East should become affiliated with the Catholic Church. During a short time until 1445 CE, a part of the Aramaic-speaking church (mainly in the Ottoman Empire, and also in Persia) had thus linked up with the Roman Catholic Church, but only in 1551 CE, Yohanan Sulaqa, was designated by the Pope as the Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon.\textsuperscript{49} These missionaries, as the representatives of the Pope, began their mission among the Church of the East, the Armenians, the Kurds and the Yezidis, “the success of which was so great that eventually half of the Church of the East became Catholic, i.e. the Chaldean Church” was established.\textsuperscript{50}

Blincoe points to the following 18th and 19th century as the period of Protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. Among these missionaries were Christian Gottlieb Hörnle and F. E. Schneider of the Basel Mission, who arrived in Tabriz, Iran, in 1834, with the purpose of the translation of the Bible into the Kurdish language. Hörnle hired a Kurdish language associate in 1835 in order to investigate the Kurdish dialects and began the process

\textsuperscript{46} Izady, \textit{The Kurds}, 164.

\textsuperscript{47} Marco Polo cited in Izady, \textit{The Kurds}, 164.

\textsuperscript{48} Izady, \textit{The Kurds}, 164.


of a Bible translation. But his effort was only short lived, because of numerous unexpected challenges.\textsuperscript{51}

Eventually, it was, however, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) that set the tone for Protestant missions in the Ottoman Empire. To obtain information on the region the American Board had sponsored a number of extensive explorations and surveys already between 1818 and 1831. “Missionary work to the Turkey-Armenia-Kurdistan region was then initiated in 1831 with the arrival of William Goodell at Constantinople.”\textsuperscript{52} “Working mainly among the followers of the Church of the East, ABCFM also sent a medical doctor to the Urmia mission in 1835, Asahel Grant (1807-1844), who set up a medical clinic treating an endless stream of patients.”\textsuperscript{53} Grant ministered among the dispersed Nestorians, Kurds and Yezidis in the mountains and started a dozen village schools.\textsuperscript{54} By 1836, Justin Perkins, also established many schools for the ABCFM in many regions of the Kurdistan of Iran. After three years the number of schools had reached 12 and continued to grow continuously during the following sixty years, despite the massacre of 1843-45.\textsuperscript{55}

According to Blincoe, Dwight Marsh came in 1850 to the city of Mosul, which was “located across the Tigris River from Niniveh.”\textsuperscript{56} In this region, Marsh and Perkins still encountered converts from the fruit of Grant’s ministry. One of these converts was a Yezidi Kurdish believer by the name of Jeremiah Shamir. He turned eventually into an important

\textsuperscript{51} Blincoe, \textit{Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan}, 37.


\textsuperscript{54} Van der Werff, \textit{Christian Mission to Muslims}, 117.


\textsuperscript{56} Blincoe, \textit{Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan}, 47.
leader for the Christian church in the region. Shamir was born in the year of 1821, in the small village of Karaimlais, fifteen miles East of Mosul and because he was an orphan, a Catholic monk took care of him and put him at the Church School of Ainkawa, near Arbil. He could speak Kurdish and Turkish fluently, and he studied Arabic, Syriac, and also some Italian. Later on, the Catholics have sent this potential young Christian to the Catholic Church in Mosul, where he encountered Protestant students of Grant and was sent by Perkins for further studies in Urmia. Shamir stayed in Mosul till 1864, but afterwards had moved to Diyarbakir in order to work in the English consulate. He passed away in 1906 at the age of 85.57

Blincoe further points out that in 1910, the Lutheran church was assigned to minister to the Kurds by a committee in the Conference of Edinburgh. The leader of this new thrust was L. O. Fossum. Because of the fact that the Lutheran missionaries were latecomers, the Lutheran Orient Mission Society (LOMS) could examine and even learn from its forerunners. Fossum believed that the most effective way of ministry to the Kurds was direct engagement with them without going through the channel of the Eastern Church.58 In the first issue of The Kurdistan Missionary in 1910, he put forth the reasons for his belief in the effectiveness of a direct ministry among the Muslim Kurds:

First, “the character of the people. For the most part warm-hearted, quick to make friends, usually loyal in friendship, the love, the friendliness of Jesus would appeal to them; democratic, freedom-loving, the freedom wherewith Christ maketh free would attract them; strong, brave, hardy, the manliness of Christian character would compel them.”59 Second, “social conditions in Kurdistan place men and women on a recognized equality, working together for the common living, holding property with equal rights and administering their affairs with equal honors, a type of character that has long been produced to which the appeal

57 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 47-48.
58 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 136-140.
59 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 136-140.
of the pure and holy life pressing forward to a holy and happy heaven can be made much more hopeful than it can be to the ordinary Moslem, who gives to woman no honor in this life and no place of her own in the next.  

And third, then there is the political condition of the Kurds. “They have no sovereignty to maintain and it is a mere matter of convenience whether they are subject to any central ruling power or not. Their souls are their own and they can do what they like with them. Married and intermarried, related and double-related throughout the tribe and into the adjoining tribes, the petty persecution that would arise because of a change of faith would be quickly extinguished by mutual friends.”

Fossum’s much more positive approach toward Kurdish culture and character, and also his optimistic view regarding the direct missionary work was not normal among missionary organizations. On September 6, 1911, the first Lutheran missionaries, comprising Fossum, a medical doctor called Edman and two nurses, came to Kurdistan. Fossum occupied himself with the study of the language and the culture of the Kurds. “He was a remarkable linguist, producing a Kurdish grammar and translating into Kurdish the four Gospels, Luther’s Smaller Catechism, a hymnbook containing 100 hymns, a Lutheran liturgy, and also an English-Kurdish Lexicon.” During the five years of their ministry, from 1911, until forced to leave in 1916, because of the First World War, “the missionaries had built up a Kurdish congregation, established an orphanage and a medical dispensary.” After the war, Fossum with some other missionaries came back to Kurdistan and continued their ministry,

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60 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 136-140.


62 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 146.


64 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 146.
but unexpectedly, Fossum passed away on November 10, 1920, near Van, at the age of 41. However, “the brief history of the LOMS in Kurdistan demonstrated that direct missionary work among Muslims, in spite of legal and social difficulties, was not only possible, but could bear fruit in a relatively short period of time.”

With the arrival of Catholic and Protestant missionaries to Kurdistan, some Kurdish Christians who were members of the Syrian or Armenian churches “changed their loyalties and united with the Catholic Church in the 16th century or the Protestant churches in the 19th century.” Izady further notes the important fact that the Kurdish believers were united under a “Protestant firman,” initiated by numerous missionaries from Europe and later on America. Many of these Kurdish converts ultimately adapted to Armenian and Neo-Aramaic or western languages, and therefore were counted among these groups. For example, at the end of the First World War and at the time of the fall of the Ottoman Empire large numbers of Kurdish Christians who were only able to speak the Kurdish language migrated from the regions of Western and Northern Kurdistan to the French Mandate of Syria. In this new region, they were told that they “must be Armenian, if they were Christians, and thus they were counted and eventually assimilated into the immigrant Armenian community of Syria and Lebanon.”

Today, an educated guess for the total number of Christian Kurds would place them in the range of tens of thousands, most of them living in Turkey. Of great interest is the development of the Kurdish-Speaking Church of Christ (The Kurdzman Church of Christ), which was established in Arbil by the end of 2000. Kurdzman Church of Christ held its first three-day conference in Ainkawa, north of Arbil, in 2005, with the participation of 300 new

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65 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 146.
66 Blincoe, Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from Kurdistan, 146.
Kurdish converts. According to one Kurdish convert, an estimated 500 Kurdish Muslim youths have converted to Christianity since 2006 throughout Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{69}

The strongest Christian constituencies in Kurdistan are, however, the Assyrian and Chaldean communities. After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, more than 100 new Christian villages were built around Dohuk, while others flocked to the entirely Christian suburb of Arbil, called Ainkawa, which numbers 25,000 inhabitants.\textsuperscript{70}

Even if the Christian communities in Kurdistan may number in the tens of thousands, they represent only a small and very versatile minority.\textsuperscript{71} Nevertheless, if they can take the lead in a process of reconciliation (first practice of Yoder) and construct a political theology, based on the five practices of Yoder and contextualized to the Kurdish Islamic context, they could provide a paradigm for a \textit{modus vivendi} that could serve as an example for all the communities of Kurdistan.

“Political”

The Christian theologian John Howard Yoder, who follows the emergent tradition, emphasizes that religion and politics cannot be separated and that the church is responsible to provide political alternatives for our society. He propagates thus for the Christian context a political position that represents an important axiom in Islamic thinking. Both Yoder and especially the early thinkers of Islamic political theology, Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, who stand for an “Islamic type of emergent tradition,” emphasize the importance of God, religion and morality for political theology.

\textsuperscript{69} https://joshuaproject.net/clusters/208, accessed on March 15, 2019.


\textsuperscript{71} Aho Shemunkasho, „Oriental Orthodox.“ In Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Todros and Todd M. Johnson, eds. \textit{Christianity in North Africa and West Asia} (Edinburgh: University Press, 2018), 256.
During the nineteenth century, changes were brought about in Islamic society by (Islamic) reformers, which shifted the view concerning politics. In the beginning of the twentieth century, these reformers had contributed to a cultural revival within the Middle East and Stephanous notes that a desire to challenge “religious superstitions with rationalism, with enlightened education and with institutional change,” advanced on the one hand the concept of patriotism that “raised opposition to Western expansion,” but also provided the basis to “reconcile Islam with the modern world.”

Change and restoration in Islamic society were based on Islamic norms and the decline in Islamic culture was being reversed by this modern Islamic philosophical approach and the feelings of “inferiority,” which came about as a reaction to the manifold advancements of the West, were eradicated by these Islamic reformers. Nevertheless, also political Islamic reformism always “looked to religion as a source of pride and development and built thus a bridge between belief in the superiority of Islam and the superiority of Western technology.”

According to Stephanous, Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1839-97) initiated this discourse, which developed into modern political Islam. Al-Afghani believed that the technologies of the West are useful for the East, but that the moralities that are linked to them should be examined. Furthermore, he pointed out the need to apply Islamic law to modern times by using the concept of “al-ijtihad (innovative reasoning).” His starting point was the concept of an Islamic League (umma), which emphasized that the history of Islam did never focus on

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national alliances or ethnic or clan loyalties, but rather religious solidarity: “they have given up a narrow bond in favor of a universal bond: the bond of faith.”

His disciple, Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), developed his thoughts even further and insisted that the principles of democracy and equality are inherent in Islam. An Islamic revival should overcome the corruption of these principles that had crept in through the centuries. He therefore emphasized that Islam “cancels all clan commitments and upholds equality among the adherents of Islam.”

Like Yoder, these early thinkers of Islamic political theology resisted the idea of the state as the primary agent of political responsibility and advocated that the umma, taking somewhat the role of the church in Islamic thinking, should present itself as a political body with a deliberate political alternative vision of a good life.

“Theology”

In political Islamic thinking human action is always integrated with God’s action. Islamic political thinking always starts with the overarching concept of God and his word, which has been revealed in the Quran, Sunna and Hadith (practice and sayings of the prophet) and laid out in the Sharia as the law that guides all temporal order. The importance of God for political thinking is based on the principle of tawhid, the unity of God. The unity and the sovereignty of God, as the overarching principles, are always first, but at the same

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time also provide room for the vice-regency of humanity.\textsuperscript{80} Also Christian political theologians, especially from the context of the emergent tradition, advocate for the necessity of the integration of politics under God. This is why an approach that integrates God and man, like Yoder’s, is so helpful to start a dialog with Islamic thinkers. A contextualized Christian Kurdish political theology must thus also take into consideration the reality of the submission of the earthly rulers to God. Al-Faruqi even points out that Islam encourages the dialog between different religions for the very reason that it believes that knowledge of God has been given initially to every nation, but in the course of history, “divinely inspired religion became transformed into historical religion.”\textsuperscript{81}

\textit{Modus operandi}

After this introductory definition of the meaning and scope of a Christian Kurdish political theology (CKPT), I want to construct now in the following five chapters a CKPT utilizing the five practices of John Howard Yoder (ethics, economics, equality, sociology and dialog), which provide the key elements for such a theology. Throughout the discussion, I will devote special attention to couch all deliberations in a language that takes into consideration the Kurdish Islamic context. In the first chapter I will thus explicate the importance of God and moral issues for CKPT. The second chapter deals with economics and its relevance for the prosperity of Kurdistan, while the third chapter puts forth the principle of equality as a \textit{sine qua non} for CKPT in order to avoid the impasse of Islamic political theology and extreme nationalism. The fourth chapter describes the relevance of the aspect of pluralism and the fifth chapter the importance of dialog for the construction of a successful CKPT. It is my

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\textsuperscript{80} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 42-43.
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hope that such a CKPT based on the five practices of Yoder would provide a paradigmatic modus vivendi for all the communities of Kurdistan.
CHAPTER ONE:

IMPORTANCE OF GOD AND MORAL ISSUES FOR CKPT

The first practice of Yoder, “binding and loosing,” emphasizes the importance of reconciliation as well as the relevance of the concept of God for politics leading to a moral theology or halakha. The practice of “binding and loosing,” integrates the human action with God’s action. When the church practices the instruction in Matthew 18:15, as they restore a person to the community by the means of forgiveness, their action becomes God’s action.82 According to Yoder, Jesus uses the word ecclesia only in the context of “binding and loosing.” The original meaning of ecclesia, he points out, is political for it is literally a “called meeting, an assembly, such as a town meeting, convened to do business, to deliberate on behalf of the entire city.”83 Yoder also emphasizes in his summary statement on this first practice that “to be human is to be in conflict, to offend and to be offended,” which promises hope even for the situation of Kurdistan, which has been war-ridden for so many centuries.84 But Yoder does not leave it there, but continues with the assertion that to be human also means “to face conflict in redemptive dialog.”85 This emphasis on reconciliation could become the starting point from which a Christian Kurdish political theology unfolds, because even though the Christian communities of Kurdistan are small, they could initiate a process of peace talks and reconciliation among the Christian groups first which could then serve as a paradigm for the reconciliation of other groups in Kurdistan.

82 Yoder, Body Politics, 1-2.
83 Yoder, Body Politics, 2.
84 Yoder, Body Politics, 13.
85 Yoder, Body Politics, 13.
But before we can propose a “redemptive dialog,” we also need to understand how serious the conflict was among the different groups in Kurdistan and to which extend the Christian groups have been “offended.” McDowall points out that when the resurgence of the Kurdish history occurred towards the turn of the 19th century, because of the incoming influence from Western Empires (Russia, since 1913) in general and the advent of Protestant missionaries in particular, the potential for conflict between the different parties was acerbated. There was, on the one hand, the strife between the established Christian communities, e.g. the Church of the East, Catholics, Protestants, etc., but also the general reaction of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and the Islamic communities against the increasing influence of the west and the ensuing new political developments. According to McDowall, the influence of western ideas and religious tolerance among the Kurdish leaders was first felt positively in the middle of the 19th century, but then unfortunately also reactionary religious forces rose to primacy in Kurdistan that had no room for tolerance. Their wrath turned first against the Yezidi Kurds. Massacres carried out against the Yezidis, with the implicit support of the Ottoman Empire and its religious leaders, resulted in a flight to Russia of most of those who survived the massacre. The ensuing ruthless massacre of 5,000 Assyrians in 1842, heralded the campaign against the Christians, “which was then followed by attacks on the Shiites, Alevites, and finally the Jews and the Babis.” Additional massacres followed during World War I (Armenian, Syriac communities), but even as late as under Saddam Hussein Kurds and Christians “have never been able to work and live together.” In light of these facts, it is important to note that nowadays, most of the Iraqi Christians, who stayed in the country, moved to the Kurdistan region.

86 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 53-65.
87 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 60-65.
88 Izady, The Kurds, 57.
Nevertheless, with all that has transpired, there still needs to be encouraged a “redemptive dialog” for reconciliation among the Oriental, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches as well as the Kurdish National Church, which could then serve as a paradigm of reconciliation for all the other segments of society (Sunnis, Shiites, Alevites, Jews, et al.). Yoder emphasizes that as the church intervenes in conflicts with its redemptive dialogical nature, communities can be built up and such reconciliation will be of paradigmatic relevance to the rest of the world. Yoder notes also that this process provides fundamental anthropological insights into the relationship of conflict and solidarity and states that to be “human is to have differences; to be human wholesomely is to process those differences,” through reconciling dialog and not through enmity between one another. Although this reconciliation has primarily its place in the context of the Christian community, Yoder emphasizes that these principle can also be applied to the wider society. If the Christian community could initiate such a dialog among each other and with the Muslim communities with the intention of reconciliation, the flourishing of all could be achieved, not only in regard to ethical and moral issues, but also in the area of conflict resolutions in the socio-political spheres in Kurdistan and beyond.

In order to demonstrate that the situation is not hopeless some examples of initial redemptive dialog should serve as rays of hope. After the death of Catholicos Mar Dinkha IV (Chicago) in March 2015, when the (Assyrian) Church of the East entered into a period of vacancy, some intensive ecumenical discussions were convened in order to investigate the possibility of the reunification with the Ancient Church of the East, which had separated in the year of 1968 and had established its center in Baghdad. The Chaldean Patriarch, Sako, even proposed a reunification of the three Syrian churches under Rome. In the end, the

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92 Teule, “Iraq,” 172.
Assyrian Church elected, however, a new Patriarch and the attempts of unification came to void.\textsuperscript{93} Nevertheless, even though this special opportunity for the reunification of all the Syrian churches has been missed, the dialog between the Chaldean and the Assyrian Church has been intensified after the Second Vatican Council and there has been even reached a remarkable agreement for Eucharistic hospitality. \textsuperscript{94} Another important ecumenical development was the creation of Babel College of Theology and Philosophy in 1991. Though directed by the Chaldean Church, the college attracts students from all communities and encourages the renovation of the ancient monasteries and churches in the area of Mosul as well as the preservation of Syriac and other Christian manuscripts.\textsuperscript{95} The above examples have shown that reconciliation and cooperation initiated by Christian groups and organizations are powerful instruments to unite the different factions of Kurdistan and facilitate unity and cooperation.

Another very important event that brought all Christian communities together was the completion of the first Sorani Bible translation.\textsuperscript{96} After 28 years of translation work, the first Bible in Sorani Kurdish was launched at a special ceremony in April 2017. \textsuperscript{97} The representative of the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, as well as Arbil’s pastor of the Kurdish-speaking church were present in this event. “Representatives of Assyrian, Chaldean and Kurdish ethnicity then read from the new Bible, including the Pastor

\textsuperscript{93} Teule, “Iraq,” 175.


\textsuperscript{95} Teule, “Iraq,” 172.

\textsuperscript{96} Kurdish vernaculars belong to the northwestern subdivision of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. They divide into two primary groups: 1) Kurmanji, composed of two major branches, Bahdinani (or North Kurmanji) and Sorani (or South Kurmanji) are considered the two main Kurdish languages. 2) Pahlawani (or Pahlawanik), also composed of two major branches, Dimili (or Zaza) and Gurani. These are further divided into scores of dialects and subdialects.

\textsuperscript{97} Tim Allen, “Pray the First Sorani Bible Has a Huge Impact,” www.sim.co.uk, accessed on February 14, 2019.
of the Kurdish Church, who read from Genesis 11.\footnote{Allen, “Pray the First Sorani Bible Has a Huge Impact.”}

Dr. Carl Moeller, CEO of Biblica, the International Bible Society, presented a special edition of the Bible to Nawzad Jalal, Director General of Public Libraries in the Kurdistan Region, who was the benefactor of the launch event, which convened in the public hall of the Central Library, Arbil, and was attended by Dr Khalid Doski, Minister of Culture of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq.\footnote{Allen, “Pray the First Sorani Bible Has a Huge Impact.”}

The impact of this new Sorani Bible translation would thus go far beyond the perimeter of Christian communities, but has become a national, religious and cultural event of unification and reconciliation for all of the people of Kurdistan.

And yet, there is still one additional astonishing example of peacemaking, initiated by WADI that makes an impact way beyond Christian circles: The Wadi Soccer Team.\footnote{WADI, Association for Crisis Assistance and Development Co-operation is a NGO based in Germany and is sponsored by secular and Christian organizations like the Weltkirchengebetstag.}

What is even more surprising is that not a single player of the team comes from a Christian background. This soccer team is composed of Kurds, Arabs, Iraqis, Syrians, Muslims, members of the religious minority Shabak, refugees, while others are internally displaced persons, as well as locals from Kurdistan.\footnote{“Football Team Breaks Religious & National Boundaries,” https://wadi-online.org, accessed on Feb. 14, 2019.} “Team Wadi promotes the modern idea of citizenship where everyone, regardless of where she comes from, which religion she follows, whether they are men or women, have equal rights.”\footnote{“Football Team Breaks Religious & National Boundaries,” https://wadi-online.org, accessed on Feb. 14, 2019.}

These examples show that the redemptive dialog initiated by the church will have effects beyond the Christian communities and reaches out to the Other. The face of the Other, is being recognized by the church and the believers. As Yoder has pointed out, by doing this, the church and the Christian community proposes a model for the world to follow. The
Kurdish context and its diversions, requires the recognition of the Other by every group of society. The recognition of the Other, requires a different philosophical approach than the traditional ontological approach, dominating philosophy since the time of Plato. For Levinas, an ontological relationship to other reduces the other to “comprehension” and “understanding.” Such philosophies “have failed to give an account of the relationship between ethical beings.” Levinas emphasizes that the relation with a being cannot be other than comprehension unless it “is the Other (autrui),” which is Levinas’ term for the human other, the other person. The claim here is that the relation with the Other goes beyond comprehension, and that it does not affect us solely in terms of a theme or a concept. By reducing the other person to a concept, the relation to the other simply remains “a relation of knowledge or an epistemological feature.” For Levinas “the absolute exteriority of the other person means that the Other can never be assimilated or incorporated into a totality. The Other is infinite.” By infinite, Levinas does not refer to the infinity in a concept which we refer to God, rather it tries to transcend the approach of the other as an ontological being and perceive the relations to the other in an ethical way. Levinas notes that “there can be no knowledge of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relationship with God.” Levinas therefore advocates for hospitality in a sense that human beings take the ethical responsibility toward

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105 Critchely, Introduction to Cambridge Companion, 11.

106 Critchely, Introduction to Cambridge Companion, 11.

107 Shepherd, The Gift of the Other, 19.

the other and see that there is an “obligation to the other, a welcoming of the other.”\textsuperscript{109} The ethical philosophical approach of Levinas, calls for responsibility toward the other: “To recognize the Other is to recognize the hunger. To recognize the Other is to give.”\textsuperscript{110} He calls for a radical hospitality and also responsibility which transcends any essence or any prior action and consciousness and thus for him, “the word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone.”\textsuperscript{111}

Nonetheless, one must not overlook the hostile nature of the Middle East toward the human other and the especially the religious other. Many religious minorities have been persecuted and are still persecuted by the majority religious groups in the Middle East. The Kurdish church and the individual believers, nevertheless must become the locus of hospitality of God, even in the face of a hostile environment. This radical hospitality and responsibility toward the other must, first and foremost, be practices by the Christians, in order to become a model for the wider society. Thus, the church must become the locus in which, the poor and the marginalized are lifted up and their dignity is restored. Such a welcoming and responsibility toward the marginalized and disenfranchised also calls the church to welcome the religious other and take responsibility toward them, even when the religious other has a different worldview. By welcoming the voice of the other, the church manifests the recognition of the \textit{Imago Dei} and opens up itself to hear the voice of God from the one who is even form another religious background. By doing this, the church manifests that the demand for justice transcends any religious barrier and penetrates the hearts of men from every walk of life.

\textsuperscript{109} Shepherd, \textit{The Gift of the Other}, 24.

\textsuperscript{110} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 75.

But in spite of what has been mentioned above, the finality of Jesus Christ must not be compromised. In John 14:6, Jesus himself says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me” (ESV). Thus, one must comprehend that such a responsibility and hospitality towards the Other is only possible through the way Jesus himself demonstrated love and hospitality towards the Other. The centrality of the gospel and the way Jesus has lived portrays a paradigm for the Kurdish church to bring about reconciliation, harmony and life together within the Kurdish society.

The second aspect of the first practice of Yoder emphasizes that the concept of God in politics leads to a moral theology or halakha. This is an essential insight for the construction of a contextualized Christian Kurdish political theology, because it has its parallels in Islamic political theology (tawhid, al-shura, al-maslaha, and ijma). Similar to Yoder’s emphasis on the importance of God and moral issues in politics, also in Islamic theology God cannot be separated from politics and moral issues (Sharia=Halacha=Regel Christi). In the following, I will explicate therefore the issue of God and morals in Islamic theology, which starts with the overarching concept of God and his word that has been revealed in the Quran, Sunna and Hadith (practices and sayings of the prophet) and laid out in the Sharia as the law that guides all temporal order. This relevance to the temporal order is based on the principle of tawhid, the unity of God, and the interpretation of the divine law via the institutions of ijma (consensus), qiyas (analogy), or by ijihad (innovative reasoning), but always in accordance with the principle of Sharia and thus ultimately on the basis of revelation as the underlying epistemological principle. This is why an approach that integrates God and man, like Yoder’s, is so helpful for dialog with Islamic thinkers. What also helps, is the fact that also in Islam, religious attitudes are no longer defined only in restrictive rituals and pre-modern

112 It is interesting to note that in the beginning Christianity was also simply called “the Way” (hodos), which is etymologically a close parallel to halakh, “to go”, and sharia, “the way”.

views, “but rather as an informal but deeply felt adherence to principles of morality and commitment to universal values.” Such an interpretation that focuses on morality is also an important concern of the first practice of Yoder. Esposito and Voll are therefore confident that a dialog can be successful, if Western concepts suspect of modernism are avoided and if an integrative approach (Yoder: Importance of God for politics) is favored. Even scholars critical of the West, like Mawdudi, are open to such an approach based on the concept of *tawhid*. This idea of the unity of God, which stresses the sovereignty of God considers democratic principles that emphasize the sovereignty of the people, as an infringement on the sovereignty of God. However, these concepts can be made compatible to Islam in an integrated system (Yoder), if the sovereignty of God as the overarching principle is emphasized first and the vice-regency of humanity as a subsidiary second. Political theologians from the context of the emergent tradition, likewise advocate for the necessity of the submission of politics to God. Smith, in drawing from O’Donovan asserts that the end of Christendom is when the state becomes the savior. CKPT must thus also consider the importance of God as overarching principle for politics. Al-Faruqi points out that Islam encourages the dialog between different religions for it believes that a knowledge of God has been given to every nation, but in the course of history, “divinely inspired religion becomes transformed into historical religion.” In a similar fashion, also Philips criticizes the concept of the secular as it “dismantles the reality that there is no practice and realm of thought,


politics included, which is devoid of theological elements.”¹¹⁹ By the same token, Smith refers to the concept of ultimate and penultimate and notes that politics and thereby democracy define our ultimate goods for they are not content to remain in the realm of penultimate and interfere and shape the ultimate, our vision of a good life, as well.¹²⁰ The earthly city is “a way of life” rather than a space with rituals and routines and thus any attempt of “spacializing the political” must be avoided.¹²¹ Al-Raysuni, likewise, questions the morality and the way democracy offers the ultimate vision of a good life. Although he encourages Muslims to adapt and borrow from democracy as an inevitable phenomenon, nevertheless, he believes that Islam can lift up democracy to a higher level byremedying it from its inadequacy. He points out that “we need democracy in the form of organizational and procedural borrowings and experiments, whereas democracy needs us to treat some of its deep-seated structural evils and maladies.”¹²² Qutb also, similar to the emergent tradition, rejects any dichotomy between spiritual and material liberation, for spiritual liberation is the foundation for social and political justice.¹²³ It is only appropriate to end this discussion with the eschatological notion of the Coming of the Kingdom, which has its parallel in Islam in the doctrine of Akhēra, which anticipates the Coming of Jesus, indicating similar eschatological notions in both religions. This notion of the Coming of the Kingdom can also serve as a checking mechanism for governments and totalitarian tendencies among Middle Eastern communities and an encouragement to rather be subjected to the rule of God. Although there will always be problems and inconsistency in the way religious authority will rule or govern,


¹²⁰ Smith, Awaiting the King, 19-34.

¹²¹ Smith, Awaiting the King, 19.

¹²² Al-Raysuni, Al-Shura, 158.

¹²³ Khir, “The Islamic Quest,” 510.
nevertheless, one can find at times, because of their theocentric approach, more similarities between the emergent tradition and Islam than with liberal secular systems of thought.
CHAPTER TWO:

RELEVANCE OF ECONOMICS FOR CKPT

In his second practice, entitled “disciples break bread together,” Yoder rejects the sacramental and symbolic meaning of the Eucharist. He rather insists that what Jesus had in mind with his statement about the bread as a sign for his memorial, was in reference to the daily meal that the church had together.\textsuperscript{124} The primary meaning of the Eucharist was thus economic rather than symbolic, because the shared food in the Early Church was the nourishment itself and not just a symbol.\textsuperscript{125} He also refers to the Jubilee as an additional aspect of relevance for the Lord’s Supper and suggests that the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is in bringing justice with consumable food and that this justice is complemented by the Jubilee that provides justice on the level of productivity and property.\textsuperscript{126}

These economic aspects of the Eucharist emphasized by Yoder are of utmost relevance for CKPT. In the period of the 1960’s, Izady points out, Kurdistan and its economy has witnessed revitalization, because the trade routes returned to Kurdistan and resulted in important growth in the period of 1970’s. This regeneration took place as the result of the flourishing economies of Iraq and Iran since the end of 1950’s and “their need to use the short land routes to European markets \textit{via} Turkey.”\textsuperscript{127} “The importance of international commercial traffic in the revitalization of the Kurdish economy and the subsidiary infrastructure, as well as its social and cultural effects, can hardly be overestimated.”\textsuperscript{128} Even though the Kurds who live in Turkey have profited the most from this process of revitalization of the Kurdish

\textsuperscript{124} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 14-16.

\textsuperscript{125} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{126} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 24.

\textsuperscript{127} Izady, \textit{The Kurds}, 67.

\textsuperscript{128} Izady, \textit{The Kurds}, 67.
economy, “it was Iraqi Kurdistan that has attracted the most attention from the outside world, in spite of the fact that it represented only about 17% of the total number of Kurds, one reason being that Iraqi Kurdistan has among the largest oil reserves in the Middle East.” Without a doubt the most productive Kurdish petroleum fields were discovered near the city of Kirkuk in Iraqi Kurdistan and petroleum refinement has thus turned into the most beneficial and developed modern industry in Kurdistan, with mining being second. It is noteworthy that “both of these industries, however, have been mainly developed to benefit the larger economy of Iraq and Turkey with a $ 7-10 billion per annum in foreign currency income.” Through negotiations with the central government of Iraq during the 1990’s, Kurdistan would eventually participate to some extend in this economic blessing through the “oil for food resolution,” which allowed for 13 % of the revenue to remain in the region.

While the future of democracy in the Middle East is less than certain, the global wave of democratization can be helpful in general, while economic developments can be supportive in particular. The theory is that economic development promotes changes in social structure that encourage democratization. Economic development *ad infra* usually creates new sources of wealth and power outside the sphere of the state, which then becomes increasingly difficult for an authoritarian regime to control. By the same token, economic involvement *ad extra* opens society to the influence of democratic ideas from other nations. But in spite of the fact that economic development can be an important element in the process of democratization, Stephanous also points out that in the Middle East there is “at times a poor

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129 Izady, *The Kurds*, 221.

130 Izady, *The Kurds*, 221-235.

131 Izady, *The Kurds*, 221-235.

132 Gerard Gautier and Georgio Francia, “A Recent Story of NGOs in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan.” (HAL Id: hal-00676669. https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00676669. Submitted on March 5, 2012), 1.

133 Stephanous, *Political Islam*, 33-34.

134 Stephanous, *Political Islam*, 34.
correlation between wealth and democracy in some countries.”

Bill and Springborg have documented that for example the per-capita GNP of the United Arab Emirates outdoes the per-capita GNP of the United Kingdom and the per-capita GNP of Kuwait is much larger than the South American countries. Yet all of these Middle Eastern countries are still ruled by an authoritarian regime. Especially, “wealth and economic development resulting from the sale of oil or natural resources does not necessarily contribute to the process of democratization.”

For Huntington, the reason for such an unexpected development lies in the fact that oil revenues decrease the dependency of any given state on taxation, which is one of the most important factors in the process of democratization, because it circumvents the strong connection between taxation and the public’s demand of representation.

“While no taxation without representation was once a political demand, no representation without taxation is now a political reality.” Because of this discrepancy between wealth (GNP) and the process of democratization in the Middle East, Bill and Springborg have introduced the alternative measure called the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), combining the following three functions: life expectancy, infant mortality and literacy rate.

While the revenues of oil are a great blessing to the Middle East and also Kurdistan, it is important to note that before growth in wealth can be transformed into improvement in the quality of life the issue of the distribution of that wealth needs to be addressed. According to Bill and

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135 Stephanous, Political Islam, 34-40.


137 Stephanous, Political Islam, 34.


139 Huntington, The Clash of Civilisations, 65.

140 Bill and Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 16.
Springborg, using the PQLI-analysis “the countries of the Middle East have not yet successfully met this challenge.”

But how has this all been worked out in Kurdistan? When the authoritarian ruler of Iraq was removed and Kurdistan experienced some autonomy, new economic developments emerged that facilitated change in social structure and values and encouraged the process of democratization. “Economic development increased the level of education, made more resources available for distribution among the various social entities and facilitated accommodation and compromise. It opened society for foreign trade, investments, technology, tourism and communication and created revenues of wealth and influence outside the government and opened society to the influence of democratic ideas of other nations.”

But also in Kurdistan the relief of poverty and the gain of wealth have only to some extend proven to be the most important step towards democracy. In fact, it has become only one economic aspect of many others and as we will see below, also in Kurdistan the revenue received from oil hindered the development of other important entities so vital for economic advancement, such as the establishing of non-government affiliated NGOs.

NGOs play an important role in the development of civil society in the Middle East, where at present many countries are going through “structural adjustment in order to recover from economic decline and to meet the hope of the masses.” “Structural adjustment has caused states to withdraw from various fields of services, which brought about a vacuum into which NGOs stepped in, in order to provide services needed by the community.”

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141 Bill and Springborg, Politics in the Middle East, 19.  
142 Stephanous, Political Islam, 34.  
143 Stephanous, Political Islam, 182-183, provides detailed statistics of the importance of NGOs in the Middle East.  
144 Stephanous, Political Islam, 183.
drastic increase of NGOs, many of whom are of a religious nature, was frequently due to foreign organizations supporting their minorities in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{145}

Thus, after the 1991 uprising of the Kurds in Iraq and the displacement of millions of Kurds in the Iranian and Turkish borders, Kurdistan has experienced the arrival of many UN agencies and NGOs, “bringing relief humanitarian aid from various countries. The main activities covered were health assistance, mother and childcare and protection, water and sanitation, and the rehabilitation of schools.”\textsuperscript{146} In the period of 1997-2003, the number of NGOs in Kurdistan was, however, drastically reduced, because much revenue was flowing into Kurdistan \textit{via} the “oil for food resolution” (5-10 Billion USD) and because the central government in Bagdad resisted the idea of having NGOs in Northern Iraq-Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{147} Nevertheless, there are still a great number of NGOs active in Kurdistan today.\textsuperscript{148}

\textit{Qandil}, a Swedish NGO funded by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency), which is involved in the area of health, water and sanitation.

\textit{Peace Winds}, a Japanese NGO, which is involved in the field of health-care and water-sanitation.

\textit{NPA, Norwegian People Aid}, funded by Norway, involved in health-care and demining.

\textit{Help Age}, funded by the UK and taking care of the elderly.

\textit{Save the Children}, funded by the UK and dealing with health and social assistance programs to children.

\textsuperscript{145} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 186.
\textsuperscript{146} Gautier and Francia, “A Recent Story of NGOs in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan,” 1.
\textsuperscript{147} Gautier and Francia, “A Recent Story of NGOs in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan,” 2-3.
\textsuperscript{148} Gautier and Francia, “A Recent Story of NGOs in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan,” 4.
**WADI**, a German NGO focused on females honor killings.

**STEP**, a German NGO, working since 2001 in the area of child protection and education.

**France Libertes**, was initially promoting educational assistance programs, like building schools and institutes, but after 1998 with an Institute teaching English and French.

These NGOs play an important role in economic and socio-economic change and interact continuously with governments, media and other independent structures.\(^{149}\) Also, “partnership between Muslim and Christian NGOs creates a new ground for common social work and encourages the idea of coexistence.”\(^{150}\) Such networking and associating of organizations demonstrates the importance of NGOs in the process of social change, indirect political participation and human rights issues.\(^{151}\) It is thus obvious that NGOs are vital for the development of civil society. According to Stephanous, NGOs in the Middle East work as mediators between the grassroots and governmental authorities and in one way or another practice democracy. Although funded at times from abroad, they are connected to the masses and are independent of the state. They also provide platforms for the training of future leaders.\(^{152}\)

While especially the Christian NGOs emphasize the importance of sharing, economics and prosperity springing out of a true Eucharistic understanding that transcends symbolism, unfortunately, the quality of true Eucharistic sharing, equality and democracy practiced even with the Christian NGOs is of concern. Although the majority of NGO heads are elected in a democratic fashion, many of them attempt to stay in office for a long period, in the same

\(^{149}\) Stephanous, *Political Islam*, 188, provides a detailed structural analysis of NGOs.


\(^{151}\) Stephanous, *Political Islam*, 188.

manner of political leaders pursuing their personal interests rather than the interest of the community. There is also debate about the conduct of elections, because in many cases, elections are held superficially and incorrectly in order to serve individuals rather than the community.\textsuperscript{153}

The economic system of Kurdistan, as a part of the Middle-Eastern economic system, as well as a part of global economy, faces thus continuously the challenges of these secular systems and the danger of unjust distribution of goods for gain’s sake. Thus, the church in general and Kurdish church in particular, must operate as an alternative society with an alternative economy, which opposes the unjust economic system of the society. This can be achieved as the Kurdish church embodies an Eucharistic way of life, resulting in a just distribution of goods among the Kurdish Christian communities and thus serves as a model for the wider society. Yoder makes a connection between Eucharist (breaking bread together) and the emergence of the church in the Book of Acts and notes that because of the centrality of that meal in the life of the church, it has extended to the “formation of economic community.”\textsuperscript{154} The community of the believers is established around the common meal for people, man and woman, who left their families and homes to constitute a new “family, a community of consumption,” having Jesus as the head of the household.\textsuperscript{155} The sharing of the possessions in Acts, Yoder mentions, transcends the concept of a “common purse” into a “common table,” for the sharing was the natural extension of the table fellowship.”\textsuperscript{156}

Such a way of implementation of the Eucharist, transcends the sacramental view of traditional churches and offers an alternative way of life, practiced by the members of the

\textsuperscript{153} Stephanous, Political Islam, 184.
\textsuperscript{154} Yoder, Body Politics, 16.
\textsuperscript{155} Yoder, Body Politics, 18.
\textsuperscript{156} Yoder, Body Politics, 17.
Kurdish churches. Wannenwetsch criticizes Yoder’s fervency of making the political relevance of this practice into a ‘model,’ because of the danger and the tendency to exploit this religious practice for political actions.\textsuperscript{157} Such a fear, however, should not hinder the church of implementing any practice into the wider aspects of life, because it can become a paradigm for a political action, which will, however, not minimize the importance of any Christian practice. Any stark distinction between the sacred and secular must be rejected. Islamic society implements its religious ideas in every aspect of life, and thus the Christian community should likewise transport the vision of the common good, even into economic systems.

There has also been a shift in regard to the Eucharistic discourse in Christian theology from a merely ontological debate to “a rather embodied, relational event and personal encounter among the people of God,” which “opens up the possibility of the connection between gift exchange and Eucharist.”\textsuperscript{158} Concentrating on the Eucharist and the presence of Christ, Cavanaugh, endeavors to investigate the relationship between economy and theology. The idea of Christ being simultaneously the giver (host) and gift (food) can be expanded to even view Christ as the recipient (eater), as Cavanaugh states that “the act of consumption is thereby turned inside out: instead of simply consuming the Body of Christ, we are consumed by it”.\textsuperscript{159} By the same token, De Lubac draws from Augustine’s approach toward the Eucharist and notes that the believers, by partaking in the Eucharist, will not transform the sacramental body of Jesus into their own body, but that they would be incorporated into the


\textsuperscript{159} William T. Cavanaugh, Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 54.
Body of Christ, the church. The concept of the body of Christ, if realized by the Kurdish church and individual believers will propagate unity among the church and consequently economic justice among the different members of the church. Members of the church will realize the importance of the Other as the Body of Christ, for by partaking in the Eucharist, “all the baptized are called to become broken bread for the world and wine poured out for others. The social justice implications of this action are profound.”

The Kurdish church must also realize the social nature of Christianity over against the individualistic spirit of the time. In this regard, Henri De Lubac, emphasizes the social nature of Christianity against modern concepts of private and individualistic Christianity, while Rowan Williams even bemoans an antithetical view between the church and the exploitative relations manifested in the globalized economy. For Williams, being informed by the Eastern Orthodox tradition, a community gathered around participation in the “self-offering of Christ” established with mutual reciprocal relations, opposes the contemporary society. William opposes the global economy and notes that Catholic theology stands in opposition to the globalized economy, because it is about the wellbeing, justice and growth of everyone. The church gathered around the Eucharist is the Body of Christ, as it is characterized by mutual relationships in one common life in which the members of the community empower each other to contribute to that common life. A true community, according to Williams, is

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the place where the risen Christ should be manifested, not by simply talking about him or celebrating him, but by being the place “where he is shown.”\textsuperscript{166} This perspective provides thus a sacramental paradigm for Yoder’s economic approach, since his merely economic approach, already implements the sharing of the daily sustenance as the mark of a true community. “The first embodiment of economic newness of the kingdom is thus basic economic sharing among the members of the messianic community.”\textsuperscript{167} This embodiment of the economic newness, implemented by the Kurdish church, will be a witness to the wider Islamic society and it can function as a model to the wider society, as Yoder proposes.

To bring about such a vision, there is a need of established churches with leaders who can be trusted by the people. The unity among the various Christian denominations is of a great importance, in order to accomplish the vision of the common good and become a vital witness to the Islamic society. Therefore, there should be alliances and organizations that unite various groups and offers a vision that considers the wellbeing of every part. As it has already been mentioned, the issue of corruption must be addressed and resolved, for this issue is not only among the leaders of the society, but unfortunately also among the Christian leaders and organizations. Here, the first practice of Yoder and the importance of morality must be emphasized and the practice of binding and loosing can help to redeem and reconcile the leaders into the community.

The church must promote the dependency of the economic system on one another as the welfare of all is recognized. The diversity of religion and ethnicity in Kurdistan requires a system that promotes the dependency on one another. Although different communities and tribes may have their own local system of economics, in the larger economic system of the region, however, they can practice trade in the local level as a means which erases the new-

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{166} Rowan Williams, \textit{Resurrection} (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), 3.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{167} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 21.}
Fordist system of distance between the consumers and the producers. In this sense, the consumer is also the producer as the exchange of goods takes place on such a small level, and not primarily on the inter-group level but also on the intra-group level. These even accelerate the process of peace and tolerance as the trade process takes place in a just manner, and as the humanity of both sides is recognized. The plurality of religious ideas or worldviews, national and ethnical differences, can also see reconciliation as the economic system goes under reformation. The sharing of goods, in a more intimae level, can be one of the most powerful means in bringing reconciliation, as the production of the hand of one party goes to serve the other party, to serve the one who is other. This makes also some psychological connection between different groups, for the work and the product of one group can be used for the benefit of the other. At the same time, as one receives a good (a product) from the other, there will be a recognition of dependency on the other, and the fact that the flourishing of one depends on the other, even the religiously and the ethnically other.
CHAPTER THREE:

SINE QUA NON OF EQUALITY FOR CKPT

Equality in political theology is the focus of the third practice of Yoder called “baptism and the new humanity.” Yoder explicates how baptism creates a new social relationship as the new creation enters a new world, whose unity “overarches the differences that previously had separated people.”\textsuperscript{168} Inducing from Paul’s concept of body, Yoder notes that baptism eradicates any social identification based on social status.\textsuperscript{169} He also criticizes the understanding of baptism as just a sacrament. In this he has in mind especially infant baptism, and notes that Paul’s egalitarian message is based on redemption, rather than the Stoic nature of the order of creation, for equality is initiated by the grace of redemption and not by any privileges of birth.\textsuperscript{170} Further, he notes that the aspect of repentance in an analogical way can be transmitted to the world as this nonviolence action endeavors to change the adversary and not to destroy her, as it “appeals to the consciousness of the oppressor.”\textsuperscript{171} A Christian Kurdish political theology likewise propagates the church, as an alternative paradigmatic community, that practices equality and non-violence among its members.

The main challenge to such an understanding of equality in Kurdistan comes unfortunately from the argument of religious Muslim believers that do not adhere to western principles of democracy and equality, because Islam is based, in the Muslim’s opinion, \textit{per definitionem} on equality.\textsuperscript{172} While it is true that equality is also an important principle in Islam, it does not, however, transcend the concept of dhimmitude with minorities nor the

\textsuperscript{168} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 30

\textsuperscript{169} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 29.

\textsuperscript{170} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 32-35.

\textsuperscript{171} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 41.

\textsuperscript{172} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 45.
priority status concerns of the nation-state. A Christian Kurdish political theology needs to thus take heed not to surrender to the two impasses of Islamic political theology and nationalism and insist on the principle of true equality.

**Impasse of Political Islam**

Some Islamic reformers have propagated an Islamic theology based on “democratic” principles and *ijtihad*. For example, the Islamist thinker Fahmy Howeidy openly argued that a citizenship contract abolishes a *dhimmi* contract.\(^{173}\) Nicholas Pelham, making already some concessions to Islamic prerogatives, proposes a *modus vivendi* based on the old *millet* system.\(^{174}\) However, it is important to note that as much as the *millet* system (system that regulated the *modus vivendi* of subordinate protected minorities) regulated the coexistence of minorities alongside the Muslim majority, it was/is still a discriminatory system, both at state and society levels, and also accepts forms of discrimination and prejudice within society.\(^ {175}\)

But the real challenge comes with the fact that most mainstream Islamic thinkers are far from an understanding propagated by Howeidy or Pelman, but rather insist that minorities living in *Dar al-Islam* are tied to a number of qualifiers, e.g. “Christians should show compliance to *Sharia* and should not challenge Islamic authority.”\(^ {176}\) The problem of political Islam is thus that it attempts to bring about complete Islamization. It does not at all lead to full equality but maintains the *dhimmi* (subordinate protected minority) status.\(^ {177}\) This aspect reduces

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\(^{176}\) Tadros, “Christianity in North Africa and West Asia,” 24.

citizenship to the category of religion, i.e., Islam, and thus automatically excludes the other, e.g., Christian minorities from being equal citizens with the Muslims. In the rhetorics of some of the Middle Eastern leaders, also the identification of nationality with religion can be clearly seen. After the overthrow of the Iranian Shah in 1979, the Iranian religious leader, Imam Khoumeini removed any boundary between religion and politics and declared that ‘our politics is our religion and our religion is our politics.’\textsuperscript{178} Over against such a position, a Christian Kurdish political theology needs to, on the one hand, emphasize the importance of God and moral issues for politics, but on the other hand it also needs to transcend the status of the 
\textit{dhimmi} and propagate the plurality and equality of religions, tribes, \textit{ethne}, and societies. There were various religious and ethnic minorities, which have been persecuted and marginalized throughout the history of Kurdistan and thus a Christian Kurdish political theology must oppose the system of dhimmitude, but rather endeavor to integrate all minorities in the vision of the common good. Kurdish political theology needs to “consider solidarity as the basis of coexistence.”\textsuperscript{179} According to Stephanous, solidarity must be based on the doctrine of creation, which emphasizes equality and justice for all. Such a solidarity results from a unity in the midst of diversity and encourages the church and other religious institutions to become contributors to the life of the civil society.\textsuperscript{180}

For our discussion, the concept of impartial state is thus of importance, since it propagates a democratic (semi-democratic) system, which provides place for the minorities to participate in the political process. For Chaplin, the impartial state is the proper system since “the state is the institution charged with being the arbitrar between different confessional


\textsuperscript{179} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 200.

\textsuperscript{180} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 200.
communities.” Drawing from Figges, also Cavanaugh notes that the state must be the “community of the communities” which endeavors to actualize the common good. Nonetheless, the power of the state must be limited as the following principles are implemented: “The distinction of the sacred with the secular; distinction between society and state; distinction between the common good and public order; and freedom under the law.” Smith, however, disagrees for he believes that the state in itself, even though limited, has directional truth and is not a natural phenomenon. Although Smith emphasizes the fact that the Christian directional view must endeavor to be the directional approach of politics, since politics is not natural, I want to argue that this is true for a majority Christian country, but in the case of Kurdistan, being a majority Muslim society, the concept of limited state can provide room for various religious groups to exercise their beliefs. Therefore, Kurdish political theology must present the vision of the good life, which is a concept that is also understood by Muslims to be the vision for various aspects of the society. Smith, however, cautions that many respond to the diversity of the vision of a good life by imposing hegemonic consensus. Such a hegemony of worldview imposed by the majority groups in the Middle East is a common pattern, which a Kurdish political theology must avoid. It should rather be informed by O’Donovan, who perceives society as “communication” (a sphere of communication), and notes that “to communicate is to hold some thing as common, to make it a common possession, to treat it as ‘ours’ rather than ‘yours or ‘mine.’” For him communication goes even beyond a simple dialogue between two parties and includes the

181 Smith, Awaiting the King, 140.


183 Cavanaugh, Migration of the Holy, 50-51.

184 Smith, Awaiting the King, 142.

185 Smith, Awaiting the King, 134.

communication of material goods, which “form a community, a ‘we.’” Communication and dialogues, as also Yoder emphasizes, opens various communities to see their commonness. In regard to the concept of the common good and politics, we have already asserted the similarities in Islam and Christianity and the fact that the vision of the common good, to a certain extent, is inherent in both religions. Such a vision of the common good, as well as the conversation, which stresses the necessity of God and morality in policy-making creates a sense of community between Christians and Muslims.

A Christian Kurdish political theology that does not give in to the impasse of Political Islam and religion must also be aware of the three kinds of societal plurality of Chaplin: structural plurality, cultural plurality and directional/religious plurality. The first two, according to Chaplin, must be celebrated, but not the third for it is the outcome of the Fall. Chaplin asserts that the directional plurality, the plurality of religion and worldview, is the most challenging form of plurality for it means that there is disagreement upon the very vision of the common good. Nonetheless, for Smith, “this does not simply entail Christian opposition to directional plurality but rather entails a constructive program for its negotiation.” Therefore, dialogue and a mutual ground will foster a society that embraces all differences and gives room to the minorities to express their views. By the same token, we also have to heed the warnings of Wannenwetsch, who criticizes Yoder’s effort of proposing these five practices as a model of political relevancy for the church, because they “make him slip back into the common tendency of functionalizing religious practice as a source for political vision and action.”

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188 Chaplin quoted in Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 136-7.
189 Chaplin quoted in Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 136-7.
190 Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 137.
partner that has the tendency to Islamize the *dhimmis* (minorities) and assimilate them into the larger identity of Islam.

On the other hand, in translating the religious practices of the church, the danger of compromising the core values of the Christian faith must be avoided. Wannenwetsch assesses Yoder’s approach of “claiming a model character for ecclesial practices as the direct line that is drawn from ‘civil imperatives’ backwards to those practices and that it buys too readily into the idea of translatability from one language into another without loss.” Nevertheless, any sectarian way of doing politics from the side of the church must be avoided. The History of Christianity in Egypt (Coptic Church), for example, teaches us that a sectarian approach toward politics decreases the vitality of the church as a part of the civil society and even leads to persecution, placing the church at the edge of the civil society and not as a vital contributor to the life of the larger society. Thus, in dialoging and working with the Islamic society, especially in the context of Kurdistan, which is a majority Muslim country, the identity of the Christian church must be preserved, and the translatability of its practices into the larger society (i.e., Islamic society) must not yield to the assimilation of Christian identity. The Kurdish Christian Church is even considered a double minority, first, ethnically, in relation to the surrounding nations (i.e., Arabs, Turks and the Persians), and second, religiously, in relationship especially to the (Sunni) Islamic majority. Because of this double minority status it is a special challenge to use the nomenclature Christian Kurdish political theology, because such a designation reflects this double minority issue. Nevertheless, the Kurdish Christian Church can make an important contribution to a Christian Kurdish political theology by serving as a paradigmatic alternative community, with an alternative way of life based on the teachings of Christ and the practices of Yoder. The Kurdish Christian Church as a political

body must manifest the love of God among herself and exercise the justice of God and equality in her dialogue with others.

Impasse of Nationalism

Middle Eastern nationalism is a modern phenomenon, however, the origin of its beginning is debated. There are at least three views concerning the development of nationalism in the region. I would want to suggest that it is the synopsis of these views that provides the best and most comprehensive picture of this complex issue.

According to the first view, the emergence of nationalism in the Middle East expanded in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, as a form of opposition movement to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the power of the West. Middle Eastern nationalism is thus closely linked with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, but at the same time also with a feeling of inferiority towards the West because of the experienced decline.

The second view emphasizes that the state-building and nationalism in the Middle East was simply a local version of a general emphasis on state-building and nationalism at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The forms of this local Middle Eastern nationalism were manifold, “including state nationalism, patriotism, pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, Zionism, Islamic nationalism, Arab nationalism, Bathism, Nasirism, Maronite nationalism, Kurdish ethno-nationalism and so on.” In the Middle East,

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nationalism has, however, not only the meaning of the Western concept of the nation-state, as it developed in the beginning of the twentieth century, but because of its Islamic context it also emphasizes the indigenous and related concept of the community (\textit{umma}).\footnote{Milton-Edwards, \textit{Contemporary Politics in the Middle East}, 44.} Nationalism contributed thus much to state-building, nevertheless, in reality its close connection with Islam led to the exclusion of other faiths. In the case of political Islam, religion became the defining element of nationalism; in the words of Qutb, “Nationalism is Islam.”\footnote{Sayyid Qutb, \textit{Maalim fi-al-Tariq (Milestones)} (Cairo: Al-Shuruk, 1987), 39.}

The third view is quite similar to the second, because it also emphasizes political independence and nationalism, but keeps it distinct from religious concepts in an attempt to escape the above-mentioned religious influence. Especially Christians in the Middle East focus only on the political aspect of independence and secular nationalism, because this made them “equal participants” in the political arena – “something they could never hope to attain in a religiously defined society.”\footnote{Bernard Lewis, \textit{The Shaping of the Modern Middle East} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21, Kenneth Cragg, \textit{The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East} (London: Mowbary, 1991), 25.}

Beyond these more general considerations, we must also point out the particularities of the Kurdish situation. In spite of the fact that most of the Kurds are (Sunni) Muslims, they neither identify with the Arabs, nor with the Turks, or the Persians, due to ethnic and linguistic differences. These differences have led to the marginalization and the persecution of the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. One dramatic example is the massacre of almost 200,000 Kurds by Saddam Hussein’s regime in the 1990s. Because of this particular Kurdish situation the challenge for a Christian Kurdish political theology to fall to the impasse of nationalism is twofold: On the one hand there is the danger of ethnic and national assimilation, because of the pressure from the surrounding nations (which threatens the...
existence of the Kurdish *ethnos*), but on the other hand there is also the danger of a nationalistic over-reaction, because of the very threats of assimilation and marginalization and the continuous pressures exerted on the Kurdish people and because of a strong desire for independence. For this second challenge the best remedy will be to heed the practices of Yoder: towards the outside (Iran and Turkey) a meaningful economic *modus vivendi* has to be developed (second practice), towards the inside in the relationship between the tribes, parties and religions equality and the dignity of the individuals has to be respected (third and fourth practice), while the importance of dialogue (fifth practice) will be paramount for good relationships and a life in prosperity within the boarders and beyond!

**Kurdistan and Independence**

Toward the turn of the nineteenth century, Kurdish history has experienced a reawakening. Carvalho-Ellmer points out that Russian Empire was expending its territory into “the northern Middle East in the Caucasus and Central Asia and that it was this movement of the boundaries of a European state into the Kurdish territories that ended the centuries of isolation of the Kurds. The Russians brought with them, among other things, new Western ideas.”

Influenced by European idea of nation-state, Haji Qadir Koyi (1817-1897), spread nationalism and endeavored creating unity among the Kurds “against tribal and local leaders.” He also advocated the implementation of the Kurdish language into the school-system and propagated an independent Pan-Kurdish State. Many other leaders followed in his footsteps in the 20th century. This kind of European nationalism, especially in the form of a nation-state, was not a popular ideology in the Middle East until the end of nineteenth

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204 Izady, *The Kurds*, 56.
century. But eventually it inspired the Kurds and other nationalities in the region, at a point in
time when the Ottoman Empire was at the edge of collapse. Nevertheless, Gunter points
out that after the First World War, two factors prohibited the formation of a Kurdish state.
The first factor was internal and due to the absence of any strong and reliable Kurdish leader.
The second factor was external. Because of the promotion of the idea of autonomy and
independence for every people group and ethnicity by US-President Woodrow Wilson, the
Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul signed the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, assenting to the
independence of Kurdistan. Mustafa Kamal Pasha, the founder of the Turkish Republic,
however rejected this treaty in the end. “His rejection of the Kurdish strife for
independence and the ban of the Kurdish language by the Turkish government resulted in
three revolts under Sheikh Said (1925), Nuri Pasha (1927), and Sheikh Sayyid Riza (1936-
38). But none of these revolts was able to stop the establishment of the Turkish Republic, nor
to establish the Kurdish independence.”

In the fall of 1940, the Kurds in Iran initiated another independence attempt, due to the
Allied invasion of Iran. By the help of the Soviet forces, the Kurds of Iran established the
Kurdish Republic in Mahabad. This Republic lasted for 11 months until the Iranian forces
devastated it. “The period following the fall of the Republic and before the rise of the
Mustafa Barzani-led Kurdish insurgency in Iraq in the 1960s was a rather quiet period of
modern Kurdish history.”

Gunter further points out that the Gulf War and the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi
army have helped the strife for independence by the Kurds. This was due to the defeat of the

205 Gunter. Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 168.
206 Gunter. Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 6-7.
207 Gunter. Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 6-7.
208 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 231-248.
209 Izady, The Kurds, 66.
Iraqi army by the international forces, which weakened Iraqi economy and military, while at the same time the Kurds in northern Iraq have not experienced this devastation, because of their protection by allied forces.210 “By the end of 1991, this area had grown to include almost 40% of Iraqi Kurdistan, but despite the opportunity to form a de facto Kurdish State after the defeat of Saddam, internal conflicts would continue for yet another decade until a unified parliament could constitute in October of 2002 a Federal State for Iraqi Kurdistan.”211

The latest attempt of Kurdish Independence in Iraqi Kurdistan is dated to the year of 2017. After the defeat of ISIS at the hand of Kurdish peshmerga and the International Alignment Forces (with the US as its leader), the Kurdish region of Iraq presented a Referendum for Independence. Despite the majority agreement of the Kurds of the region (over 95 %) to move towards independence, the referendum was denied by the Iraqi government and thus was defeated.

But with all the emphasis on independence and autonomy a Christian Kurdish political theology must never loose sight of the aspect of peacemaking and nonviolence. It comes to no surprise that Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) from the Mennonite tradition (Yoder) have been active in Kurdistan since 2006. CPT documents and reports the effects of ongoing attacks on the civilian population from Turkish and Iranian cross-border military operations, calls for local and international attention, and advocates for peaceful solutions. CPT provides also space for learning new methods and techniques to solve conflicts, transform power, and reduce violence through peaceful means. It facilitates the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and various other mediations and nonviolence workshops where participants can explore conflict resolution as well as train to become facilitators in their own communities.212

These emphases on nonviolence approaches provide an effective paradigm for CKPT when it

210 Gunter, Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 16-17.

211 Gunter, Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 16-17.

comes to the endeavor to maintain dialog with all groups of society and to build a pluralistic society, which is the topic of our last two practices.
The fourth practice of Howard Yoder, called “the fullness of Christ,” points to the emergence of a new group dynamic in the church emphasizing the dignity of everyone, since she is the recipient of God’s gift.\textsuperscript{213} This distribution of a gift, in Paul’s mind, is a sign of the victory of Christ and an indication of an unnatural phenomenon and also the delineation of a new direction, different from what had been practiced so far.\textsuperscript{214} He reemphasizes once again the importance of redemption over creation and notes that Paul’s metaphor of the body breaks all the presumptions of the hierarchical social structure made by the order of creation, because the only head of the body is Christ.\textsuperscript{215}

Unfortunately, we have seen above that political Islam does not rigorously transcend the concept of dhimmitude in order to bring about true equality. In the words of Stephanous “the Muslim religion and its non-pluralistic nature leads to the exclusion of those of different faiths.”\textsuperscript{216} He therefore argues for the concept of a dynamic citizenship, “which is based on equality and a form of coexistence where everyone can be both governor and be governed.”\textsuperscript{217}

But he is also aware of the challenges in developing such a concept of dynamic citizenship. First, Middle Eastern societies are “patriarchal and traditional.” Second, some states are characterized by a power structure that was imposed from the outside and supports political elites, and marginalizes other groups. Third, democratic paradigms were used and also imposed from the outside through the influence of elites and colonial powers. Fourth, political

\textsuperscript{213} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 47.
\textsuperscript{214} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 49.
\textsuperscript{215} Yoder, \textit{Body Politics}, 53.
\textsuperscript{216} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 171.
\textsuperscript{217} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 171.
Islam did not emerge as a movement in opposition to the state but rather as a controller of the state. Political Islam was mainly seen as a political tool to establish the Islamic state. Fifth, there was no political theology to encourage coexistence and promote citizenship.\textsuperscript{218}

Nevertheless, Stephanous proposes the concept of “dynamic citizenship” as an indigenous concept of citizenship that can integrate into the Middle Eastern context.\textsuperscript{219} Its goal is the development rather than the destruction of the old structures. As an example he refers to the historical fact that in spite of the fact that “Islam attacked in its beginning the fanatic clan and tribal commitments, the structure of the tribe was kept and used in positive ways,” and likewise, the development of civil society must start from the old structures and build on them.\textsuperscript{220} In the last two decades, the withdrawal of the role of the state in social and economic services due to economic restructuring, the emergence of human rights organizations and greater political participation have prepared the Middle East for a re-birth of civil society that involves institutions and structures that are not governmental but connected to social, economic and religious communities.\textsuperscript{221} The primary new structures of civil society are political parties, unions and NGOs.\textsuperscript{222}

The concept of dynamic citizenship is also of great relevance for a Christian Kurdish political theology that propagates a process where Christians and Muslims and all other religions can work together to actualize equality and realize their independence and freedom. Dynamic citizenship is a social, economic, cultural, and political process, which transcends religious differences. To achieve this, organizations need to be granted, however, some independence in order to pursue economic, cultural and religious initiatives for the common

\textsuperscript{218} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 171-173.

\textsuperscript{219} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 174

\textsuperscript{220} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 179.

\textsuperscript{221} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 178-179.

\textsuperscript{222} Stephanous, \textit{Political Islam}, 181.
good of the society. The interaction between the state and the social organizations, as well as between the old and new structures of society will create networking and pluralism and will result in social restructuring and new agencies transcending traditional religious and ethnic divisions.²²³

A society that is marked with religious or elitist divisions is ripe for conflict. A society that is based on equality and dynamic citizenship that focuses on human rights, social development, economic prosperity, interfaith dialog, professional rights, non-violence, gender balance and environmental protection will transcend traditional divisions and will be open to activate people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds.²²⁴

Working together in various segments of society will create an inclusive pluralism characterized by multiple entities that work together for the good of a state (or the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan). In such a setting of inclusive pluralism the Christian communities are firstly called upon to renounce passivity, but rather take a lead in the cooperation with Muslim and all other segments of society for the common good. This will create a new identity and transcend the concept of minority/majority that is based on ethnic, elitist or religious affiliation.²²⁵ The church needs to overcome passivity and develop the concept of church (ecclesia) as political entity that is willing to play a vital role within Kurdish society and become a gift for the region.²²⁶ The church must employ the concept of the Kingdom of God for the above suggested inclusive pluralism and diversity. The goal for Kurdistan must not be its Islamization nor Christianization but an inclusive pluralism where Muslims and Christians, as well as all other groups, work together for the common good of


²²⁵ Stephanous, Political Islam, 211.

²²⁶ Stephanous, Political Islam, 199.
the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan. In order to be able to build up the Kingdom of God, the
different groups need to become more aware of each other. The first step to pluralism is to
better understand each other. 227

The Kurdish population has been influenced by the Indo European (Iranic) languages,
culture and genetic elements during the two millennia prior to the Christian era, which then
brought about change within the Kurdish faiths, by incorporating Aryan religious practices
and deities. “Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity successively made inroads into
Kurdistan. Zoroastrianism did not succeed, however, in converting any appreciable proportion
of the Kurds. On the contrary, it was the indigenous Kurdish religions that deeply influenced
Zoroastrianism in the end.” 228 Multiple Jewish communities evolved within the
Mesopotamian area, once the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity took place, succeeded by the
establishment of the Jewish Kingdom of Abiabene. However, during the Byzantine Period,
the Jewish Kingdom soon adopted Christianity, which then was soon followed by Islam. All
these different periods added to the Kurdish religious diversity. Since Islam became
eventually the religion practiced among the majority of the Kurds, we want to introduce it as
the first “religious other.”

Islam

“About three-fifths of the Kurds, nearly all of them Kurmanji speakers, are today at
least nominally Sunni Muslims of the Shafite rite. There are also followers of Shiite Islam
among the Kurds, particularly in Southern and Eastern Kurdistan in Iran. They number,

227 For the sake of brevity, I will only be able to introduce the “religious other.” For a discussion of the
“other tribe,” the “other party”, as well as linguisc, geographical, economic and other aspects of plurality, see
the excellent summaries in Izady, The Kurds.

228 Izady, The Kurds, 131.
however, no more than 1 to 1.5 million, i.e., between 5-7% of the total Kurdish population.”229

When Iran was predominantly Shafite Sunni Muslim in medieval times, the Shafite Sunni rites also emerged among the Kurmanj. At the end of the medieval period, the Turkic tribes arrived from the east in order to populate parts of Anatolia. They brought the Hanafite rite predominantly to central Asia, which had most influence on the west of Kurdistan. However, its influence did not bring about change on the Shafism of the Kurds, but introduced the Naqshbandi Sufi order into Kurdistan. This change lasted up to this day, since the “Kurdish Shafite Muslims now constitute the largest community of adherents to this once pervasive Sunni rite in the northern Middle East. They are now sandwiched between the Shiite Persians and Azeris on the east, Hanafite Sunni Turks on the west and north, and Hanafite Arabs of Syria and northern Iraq on the south.”230

Cult of Angels

The majority of Kurds, who do not follow the Islamic religion are known as followers of the “Cult of Angels”, which is known as Yazdani in the Kurdish language. The term Yazdanism or Cult of Angels, comes from the branch Yezidism, which literally means “the angelicans”. Yezidism, Alevism, and Yarsanism are the only three branches of the Cult of Angels that remained from since ancient times. Members of the Cult of Angels all believe that there are seven angels that protect the universe, while there are seven more angels that are protecting the dark forces. “Another shared belief is the belief in the transmigration of souls through numerous reincarnations. The cult also believes in an all-encompassing, but fully detached “Universal Spirit” (Haq), whose only involvement in the material world has been his

229 Izady, The Kurds, 133.
230 Izady, The Kurds, 135.
primeval manifestation as a supreme avatar who, after coming into being himself, created the
material universe."  

It is the Spirit that binds the material world together by its essences, while staying out of the affairs of the material world. All branches of the Cult of Angeles, with the exception of the Yazidies, believe that the Lord God is the prime avatar and creator. Furthermore, the Creator is manifested in five additional avatars who then assumed the position of his deputies in maintaining and administering creation. In the first epoch of the universe the Creator and the ever-present Spirit brought about life. “This epoch was to be followed by six more, a new epoch occurring each time the soul or essence of the avatars of the previous epoch transmigrates into new avatars, to again achieve with the Spirit the holy number Seven. Following these original seven epochs and major avatars, new, but minor, avatars may emerge from time to time.” Yet, the importance and contributions to the period of time in which they live is limited. Three individuals have risen to the station of avatar in this century: “Shaykh Ahmad Barzani (supposedly a Muslim), Sulayman Murshid (a Syrian Arab Alevi), and Nurali Ilahi (a Yarsan leader).”

Yarsanism

Most followers of Yarsanism live in Southern Kurdistan in Iraq and Iran. Their territory is similar to the Gurani Kurdish dialect. Yarsanism believes that the human being is the final product of evolution and the journey of a soul. The journey of the soul begins by entering objects that are inanimate. It lives within plants, then animals and completes its journey by entering into a male or female body. Once the soul has entered into a body, it “begins a new transmigratory journey, which can last for 1001 reincarnations, equivalent in time to the 50,000 years allotted to the universe. At the end of this evolutionary journey, a

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231 Haq, is not derived from the Arabic haqq, meaning “truth,” as commonly and erroneously believed.

232 Izady, The Kurds, 137.
person reaches salvation and becomes a human, a holy, perfect being worthy of the high heavens and total union with the Universal Spirit. Because of this strong belief in reincarnation, the dead are scarcely mourned by the Yarsans, as they are expected to return soon, if not immediately, in the body of a newborn.”  

One can find a common ritual among Yarsanism, where the prieststries to identify the soul which has incarnated into a new born body.

Yarsanism has a body of sayings, or kalam, and traditions rather than a divine holy book. Yarsanism’s center is deep within the Guran region at the town of Gwara, which lies about 40 miles west of Kirmanshah. At the moment there is an estimate of 10-15% Kurds who identify with Yarsanism as their religion.

Alevism

Although Alevism was not favorable among the Ottoman Empire, there are presently estimates of 20% of Alevites among the Kurds, who perceive Ali as the most important primary avatar of their religion. As a matter of fact, president Bishara al-Assad from Syria is an Alevi. Furthermore, “The Shabaks, who live to the immediate south-southeast of Mosul, also practice a form of Alevism.”

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235 Izady, *The Kurds*, 149.
236 Izady, *The Kurds*, 152.
239 Izady, *The Kurds*, 150.
Yezidism

The word Yezidi is an old and middle Iranic term yazata or yazad, which can be translated as “angel”. Yezidism strongly emphasizes the existence of angels, among whom they also include Lucifer, referred to as Malak Tawus. Lucifer is not perceived as a prince of evil or darkness, but is of the same nature as the other archangels. “In fact, it is Malak Tawus who creates the material world using the original cosmic egg, or pearl, in which the Spirit once resided.” At present, there are only 5% of the Kurdish populations who identify with the Yezidi religion.

The holy area and surrounding of Lalish has been the burial site of Shaykh Adi, which is known to be the most important personage of the Yezidi religion, similar to the role of Sahak in Yarsanism and Ali in Alevism. Although there are multiple sacred works about Yezidi beliefs, there is no holy book of divine origin. The number of Yezidi religious followers can be misleading, since the Yezidis were dominant during the time of Saladin’s conquest of Antioch. They lived in the valleys of the Amanus coastal mountains in the 13th and 14th centuries, and converted many Christians and Muslims to their religion. But ever since, there have been multiple attempts by the Muslims and Christians to convert the Yezidis peacefully and by force. “Failing peaceful conversion, the Ottomans carried out massacres against the Yezidis in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. The massacres recurred in Ottoman domains in the middle of the 19th century, resulting in a great migration of Ottoman

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240 Izady, The Kurds, 153.
241 Gunter, Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 307-308.
242 Izady, The Kurds, 154.
243 Gunter, Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 307-308.
244 Izady, The Kurds, 157.
Yezidis into the Russian territories in the Caucasus. Even until 2018, the Yezidis were brutally persecuted and forced to convert to Islam, by ISIS.

Sufi mysticism

Among multiple of the Kurdish Muslims and non-Muslims one can identify followers of many mystical Sufi orders (tariqa). *Sufi* is the Arabic word for “wool”. Often a person who is Sufi, is a person of wool or an ascetic. Wool is generally a material that is worn by the members of the order. "Both the terms *Sufi* and *dervish* are used for members of mystical brotherhoods that emphasize the immanence of God rather than His transcendence."

There are Sufi shaykhs, who train deputies (khalifa) that then supervise the followers of any distinction, and who collect allegiances and dues for the shaykh. Those who want to follow a shaykh must pass through a process of initiation. "The soul is to sink itself into the divine by contemplation, thus returning to absorption in the Godhead by a toilsome ascent of eight steps. The eight steps of the ascent are (1) service, (2) love, (3) seclusion, (4) knowledge, (5) ecstasy, (6) truth, (7) union with God, and (8) extinction. New members (murids) then participate in many rituals, including the Sufi dances, chants, and prayers. When necessary they will go into combat for their shaykhs."

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249 Izady, *The Kurds*, 158.


251 Izady, *The Kurds*, 158.
Babism & Bahaiism

In 1844 Babism was founded by Mirza Ali Muhammad (1819-1950) in Persia. One of the foundational beliefs of the Kurdish Babis is that the soul transmigrates. Many Kurds became followers of Babism. An early Babi Kurdish community located in north-central Kurdistan by the Perso-Ottoman border, numbered about 5,000 Babis. It did not take long until Babism developed into universalist Bahaiism, which was directed by Mirza Husayn Ali, Bahaullah. “For two years before his proclamation of the new religion and his mission in April 1863, he lived in the Kurdish city of Sulaymania, earning his livelihood by providing Muslim religious services to the local people under the pseudonym Dervish Muhammad.”

In 1960 a Kurdish Bahai, known by the name Muhammad Zaki al-Kurdi, established the first Kurdish publishing house in Cairo. During World War I, Zaki al-Kurdi took over the first Kurdish newspaper and its publications. It has always been the desire of the followers of Bahaiism to become separated from the militancy of Babism. As Bahaiism developed into a new world religion it distanced itself from Shiite Islam and the influence of the Cult of Angeles. However, there are still several principles of the Cult of Angels that remain in modern Bahaiism. “1) universalism, that is the belief that other religions are an extension of a same original idea of faith, and that all are equally respectable; 2) the belief that all prophets and holy figures of other religions are manifestations of the same supreme Deity or Spirit, from Buddha and Zoroaster, to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad; 3) the belief that the Word and, supposedly the soul, is conveyed to these prophets through an intermediary archangel; 4) the practice of a mandatory ritual communal gathering at Mahfels, similar to the ceremony of

252 Richter, A History of Protestant Missions, 287.
253 Izady, The Kurds, 165-166.
256 Izady, The Kurds, 166.
Jam in the Cult, but every 19th day; 5) social and class liberalism, and a high status of women, including their right to serve on high religious councils.”

Judaism

According to Hennerbichler, there are ethnic similarities between the Jewish and the Kurdish people. Judaism and its historical evidence within Kurdistan can be traced to ancient times. During the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age, Abraham migrated from the Kurdish homeland to the Holy Land. Jewish history also acknowledges the Kurdish and Jewish similarities and states that after the Assyrian deportation (721BCE) the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel resettled in Kurdistan and Khurasan. “As Judaism expanded in Mesopotamia over the centuries the royal house of Adiabene, with Arbil as its capital, was converted to Judaism in the course of the 1st century BC, along with, it appears, a large number of Kurdish citizens in the kingdom as well.” Then, in the 4th and 5th century, the Aramaic language was used across the multiple religious communities, and Christianity became the religion of the Kingdom of of Abiabene. Before the Jews returned to Israel in the middle of the past century, most of the remaining Jewish groups, which were living in Kurdistan spoke the Aramaic language. Before the great exodus to Israel in 1950-51, there was an estimate number of 146 Jewish communities living in Kurdistan, Iraq.

So much for a brief introduction of the “religious other” in Kurdistan. In Christian hermeneutics there are various approaches that consider the “other,” e.g. post-colonial hermeneutics, feministic hermeneutics, ethnic hermeneutics. The pluralistic interpretation of religious texts is a key concept in developing a political theology that promotes pluralism. On

257 Izady, The Kurds, 166.
258 Hennerbichler, Die Herkunft der Kurden, 13-197.
259 Richard C. Foltz, Religions of the Silk Road, 30.
260 Izady, The Kurds, 162.
the Islamic side, Tazinim Abu Zaid and Said Ashmawi have developed and advocated a pluralistic reading and interpretation of religious texts.262 With them pluralistic readings of the text is a key concept in Islam. Although the source of religious texts is God, it takes human form through the communicator. Since humans are diverse, there will be multiple interpretations of the text. Al-Tizini, therefore notes that the analysis of these texts needs freedom to use scientific research, rationalism with its critical view and historical and dialectical interpretation of events and phenomena.263 Ashmawi warns that political Islam should not implicate a naïve literal interpretation of religious texts, without taking into consideration of the context which the text has been addressed to, because otherwise verses can be taken out of context and turned into divine decrees to accuse opponents of blasphemy, with the punishment of death as its consequence.264 Furthermore, Al-Jabri points out the issue of political Islam being over-emphasized, although the religious text, both the Quran and Sunna, had only little input on the issue on the relationship between state and politics. The original religious text much more determined personal matters rather than civic law.265 Also, Al-Jabri is aware of the danger for political Islam to go beyond the instruction of the religious texts, because both Quran and Sunna had originally little to say on the relationship between state and politics, and it did not determine civic law in the same way that it explains personal matters.266

A Christian Kurdish political theology needs to follow an open pluralistic hermeneutic that is not constrained by sectarian religious considerations but needs to choose solidarity as a

262 Stephanous, Political Islam, 200.
basis for coexistence instead. The problem with political Islam and other sectarian approaches is their commitment to religion alone. Solidarity, however, will encourage a political theology that accepts other ideas and sees the Kingdom of God as a way towards pluralism and diversity. Stephanous notes that dynamic citizenship can be implemented in a society by considering the concept of solidarity in theology as an instrument for common coexistence and struggle. The doctrine of creation and its radical inclusiveness as it considers the necessity of an equal right for each and every member of a society must be the basic of such a solidarity. This is a theology that transcends the limitation and the exclusion of religious communities and promotes unity in the midst of diversity. “Solidarity will also contribute to the socialization of the church and encourage the religious institutions to become an active part in civil society.”

Stephanous also suggests several practical activities that can contribute to generating dynamic citizenship: (1) Use of media that has the ability to produce television programs, dramas, panels and even real stories of portraying coexistence and life together, which “contributes to a future that transcends religious and social divisions,” (2) Revision of educational curricula with the intention of promoting “diversity, pluralism and tolerance,” (3) Financial independence of the civil society and various organizations which advance the economy, while avoiding the dominance of the state organizations. This will take place as the NGOs develop their own system of funding which can be obtain from the local “Middle Eastern businesses and small in-come-generating projects.” Such independent organizations will contribute to the economy of the state that emphasize the partnership of the state with the NGOs, (4) Creating bridges among the civil society (e.g., NGOs) and institutions will reinforce the importance of civil society. Advocacy in areas of “coexistence, equality, justice,

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267 Stephanous, Political Islam, 199.
268 Stephanous, Political Islam, 200.
269 Stephanous, Political Islam, 200.
human rights, education, culture and citizenship will encourage the state to put these issues also on their agenda,” (5) Capacity building and new type of leaders will emerge.\footnote{270}

In addition to that, common action at the local level enhances partnership and will build a better understanding of community structures and circumstances. “Informal structures will build links between residents, secular and religious leaders, service providers and government officials and will provide the poor and the socially excluded with access to basic rights and services.”\footnote{271} These efforts will help community providers, secular and religious leaders to work together more efficiently and raise at the same time the individuals’ awareness of their “civil, economic and social rights and skills” and enhance and enrich their experience of dynamic citizenship.\footnote{272}

As we will see in more detail below, also interfaith dialog will promote pluralism and bring together the different religions and enhance their mutual understanding and their skills to deal with contemporary issues in religion, culture and society. “Guided by principles of equality, justice, pluralism, and solidarity, the dialogue will create an environment for interaction between the various religious, tribal, economic, social and cultural groups of society.”\footnote{273} In the end, dialogue “will provide a forum for individuals from different faiths to interact, create mutual understandings on societal issues and promote harmony, co-existence, solidarity and loyalty.”\footnote{274}

Last, but not least, CKPT must also advocates for the empowerment of both men and women. In order to be able to better evaluate the traditional status of women in Kurdish

\begin{footnotes}
\item[270] Stephanous, Political Islam, 202.
\item[271] Stephanous, Political Islam, 202.
\item[272] Stephanous, Political Islam, 202.
\item[273] Stephanous, Political Islam, 202.
\item[274] Stephanous, Political Islam, 202.
\end{footnotes}
society, it is useful to examine their role in certain fields that are usually dominated by men, such as the military, politics, and religion. It is interesting to note that at the 12,000-year-old cemeteries at Shanidar in central Kurdistan (famous for its Neanderthal remains) the only adornments found buried with most female skeletons were well-ornamented knives, indicating the appreciation of weapons by women. With the Qults, who are among the ancient ancestors of the Kurds, it was the women who often commanded the army. Also today, the participation of women in the military continues in Kurdistan, as nearly all-political parties (except for the fundamentalist Islamic parties), who command a fighting peshmerga guerrilla group, include women in their ranks. Kurdish freedom fighter parties are even equipping female soldiers and leaders to fight against ISIS and for the Kurdish independence.

In politics Kurdish women have been similarly active from the earliest times. The last ruler of an important medieval Kurdish Daylamite dynasty was a woman. “For nearly 30 years she safeguarded the kingdom from the onslaught of the Turkic nomads. Queen Helena of the Kurdish Kingdom of Adiabene, who, after converting to Judaism, is traditionally held to have been instrumental in the conversion of her royal husband and later the kingdom, was one of the most important and prominent Kurdish leaders ever.”

In religion women again play a primary role. The native Kurdish Cult of Angels includes a female among the major avatars of the Universal Spirit in every one of the seven epochs of the life of the material world. “The high social status and relative freedom of


Kurdish women adopted by the Kurdish Jews gave rise already in the 17th century to the first woman rabbi, the famous Rabbi Asenath Barzani.\(^{280}\)

But in spite of the fact that Kurdish women have held a somewhat elevated position in the context of Middle Eastern societies, even during the 20th century, they still have been actively discriminated and violated by their patriarchal society. Some women rights were conceded in 2005 with the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Women received the privilege to become members of the local government cabinet, which opened the door in a democratic context to achieve more rights. Nevertheless, women still seem to be marginalized and dominated by the patriarchal mentality. Unfortunately, the Kurdish society is still practicing honor killings and other types of woman violence, which seems to be deeply rooted within the tribal mentality. Just to show how serious the situation still is even today is the unbelievable fact that still about 40\% percent of Iraqi Kurdish woman and girls prevail a Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), while in rural areas the number rises to an estimate of 70\%. Girls that experience such mutilation are usually five years old, but the age can vary between two till twelve (WADI, 2012).\(^{281}\) It is especially Christian woman non-profit organizations that are fighting against these atrocious practices and for the rights of women advocating for all the oppressed within all parts of Kurdistan.\(^{282}\)

The church as a community, by propagating and implementing equality among the various segments and individual members of society, male and female, can be a model of equality and justice to the broader Kurdish community. Achieving such an equality, even  

\(^{280}\) Izady, *The Kurds*, 162, 194. The relative freedom of Kurdish women among the Kurdish Jews led in the 17th century to the ordination of the first woman rabbi, Rabbi Asenath Barzani, the daughter of the illustrious Rabbi Samuel Barzani (died ca. 1630 CE), who founded many Judaic schools and seminaries in Kurdistan. For her was coined the term Tannaith, the feminine form for a Talmudic scholar.


among the Christian communities, is not an easy task, but the church as a witness to the
justice of God in the world, must especially strive to create space for women to flourish and
take the role of leadership in various areas of the church and the community.
CHAPTER FIVE:

IMPORTANCE OF DIALOG FOR CKPT

We can draw from Yoder that the practice of “the rule of Paul” can transcend Christian communities as the church dialogs with the world. This last practice of Body Politics, in which, Yoder, by pointing to 1 Corinthians 14 focuses on the way a Christian meeting must be held, is an instruction to stop a worship meeting and listen to whoever has a message from God, as everyone else listens and weighs it.\(^{283}\) He refers to the Council of Jerusalem in the Book of Acts, supporting the integration of the gentiles into the body of Christ, and the phenomenon of open meeting in the time of the Reformation, which gave room to the margins and minorities by the means of conversation rather than voting.\(^{284}\) Open meetings can transcend Christian communities as the church dialogs with the world for the restoring power of Jesus requires one to even listen to her adversary.\(^{285}\)

Nowhere in the world has the art of skilled dialog and negotiations been appreciated more than in the Middle East. It comes therefore at no surprise that especially in the Islamic context we find much emphasis on dialog quite similar to this practice proposed by Yoder. The importance of the Islamic concepts of “consultation,” “judgment,” and “consensus” is undisputed and illustrates that there are similarities in Islam to the Christian practice of Yoder and proper democratic procedure in general. We have to take into consideration, however, that while Islamic groups perceive modernization and its technological developments as beneficial for the Islamic world, they by in large reject modernity, which is seen as transporting the values and principles of Western culture. Even the concept of democracy is thus seen as a Western construct that places sovereignty and power with the people rather

\(^{283}\) Yoder, Body Politics, 61.

\(^{284}\) Yoder, Body Politics, 62-67.

\(^{285}\) Yoder, Body Politics, 69.
than with God. Nevertheless, though the concept of “democracy” is seen as foreign, there are in Islamic political thinking available indigenous and appropriate conceptualizations for describing the right of political participation and freedom.\footnote{Stephanous, Political Islam, 41-42.} According to Joffe, using these Islamic concepts rather than Western terms like “democracy,” “scientific analysis,” “rational speculation” - all seen as elements of Western modernism - are helpful to move towards some measure of compatibility between Western democracy and some of the democratic principles found with Islamic theology.\footnote{Joffe, Democratisation, 140-141.}

Accepting the overarching sovereignty of God (tawhid) and using indigenous language, “Islamic democracy” could thus be achieved by the principles of consultation (al-shura), consensus (ijma) and independent interpretative judgment (ijtihad). These operational concepts of dialog play a major role in shaping the Muslim perspective of what represents legitimate and authentic democracy in an Islamic framework.\footnote{Esposito and Voll, Islam and Democracy, 21-30.}

*Al-Shura* (consultation) in Islam is not “based on rulers seeking advice from other people, but rather it is a mutual discussion on the basis of equality. As such it reflects an important principle of dialog and democracy.”\footnote{Stephanous, Political Islam, 43.} Especially Sulayman suggests that *al-shura* and democracy are synonymous in conception and principle: “Both *al-shura* and democracy arise from the central consideration that collective deliberation is more likely to lead to a fair and sound result for the social good than individual preference. Both concepts also assume that majority judgment tends to be more comprehensive and accurate than minority judgment.”\footnote{Sadik J. Sulayman, “Democracy and al-Shura,” in Liberal Islam, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), 98.}
of the equality of right and responsibility of all people: “both thereby commit to the rule of the people through applications of the law rather than the rule of individuals or a family through autocratic degree. Both affirm that a more comprehensive fulfillment of the principles and values by which humanity prospers cannot be achieved in a non-democratic, non-shura environment.”291 Al-Raysuni notes that al-shura alone cannot bring the vision of the common good, and similar to Yoder, he advocates for a necessity of “high moral standards and ethical guidelines” in the practices of al-shura, dialog and democracy.292 Stephanous suggests that although al-shura might differ from democratic consultations in terms of the details of application because of the issue of contextualization with local customs, “both agree on the necessity for free elections, accountability, government legitimacy, the sovereignty of the people through the constitutional process, and the possibility of the impeachment of a ruler for the violation of trust.”293

The aspect of consensus (ijma) in Islam is based on the collective judgment of the community is another important element to be respected in dialogical procedures. “Historically, consensus has been limited though mainly to the Islamic scholars in the process of the development of Islamic law and had less significance in the life of the Islamic community.”294 The third aspect is the exercise of an independent judgment (ijtihad), “which can enable the Islamic community to implement God’s will at any given time or place.”295

Some writers on the subject even consider the idea of the caliphate as embracing ideas of dialog and democracy, because it is actually based on the community of believers rather

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293 Stephanous, Political Islam, 44.
294 Espositio and Voll, Islam and Democracy, 21-30.
295 Sulayman, Liberal Islam, 98.
than a single ruler. According to Stephanous, the term in Arabic means a “deputy,” “representative,” or “agent” and conveys the idea of a representative of God here on earth – a vice-regent of God. The actual authority of the caliphate is thus placed with God and the process of deliberation of the community.296

We have thus seen the compatibility of Islam and democracy, because of the dialogical collective approach through consultation, consensus and independent interpretation. These concepts, in Islamic understanding, do not derive from a Western democratic system of collectivism, pluralism and equality, but are rather seen as principles that precede modern political ideology. In this paper, it is not my goal to solve this issue of interdependency of concepts, but rather I want to put forth the importance of finding and using concepts in Islamic ideology that are close to our understanding of the dialogical democratic process on the one hand, but can also be contextualized to the Islamic context on the other. With Esposito and Voll, I want to conclude that the efforts by Muslims to develop these dialogical concepts are very important and very similar to the Western process of participatory democracy. In a global world, these Islamic concepts of dialog and deliberation are helpful for the “process of democratization” contextualized to the Middle East in general and Kurdistan in particular. The idea of a single democratization process, resulting in a fixed civilization structure should be avoided. Instead, it should be made possible for different experiences of democratization to exist, complementing, supporting and influencing each other.297

One important question to still be considered is the practical compatibility of the two systems, i.e. the question, if Muslims can participate in non-Islamic governments that implement democracy. Rachid Ghannushi suggests that the alliance between Muslims and secular democratic groups will lead to “the establishment of a secular democratic government

296 Khir, “The Islamic Quest,” 504-5.
297 Espositio and Voll, Islam and Democracy, 32.
which will respect human rights, ensuring security and freedom of expression and belief – essential requirements of mankind that Islam has come to fulfill.”

Ghannushi advocates for the possibility of Islam and democracy following an integrated system (Yoder). It is obvious that there are other voices, but it needs to be maintained that all religions are in principle capable of multiple interpretations. Also the European systems went through a time of reform from monarchies to democracies. There is hope also for Islam, because of the principles of *tawhid*, caliphate, *al-sura*, *ijma*, and *ijtihad* to participate in a meaningful process of dialog. In such a dialog the Christian communities could take the lead on the level of the church (ecumenical dialog) and on the level of the inter-faith deliberations, but also must not absent itself on the level of political dialog.

**Ecumenical Dialog**

The Christians of the Middle East have been subject to much international concern since the war in Iraq and Syria. They represent by in large the most ancient Christianity and are the last witnesses to the gospel in this region. Five families of churches are present: (1) the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches, (2) the Catholic Churches, (3) the Protestant Churches, (4) the Evangelical Churches, and (5) the Independent Churches (BMB).

“Ecumenism in the East is a matter of life or death,” so the strong conviction of Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV. The most important ecumenical movement of the region is

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299 Hachem Gabriel, „Ecclesiology,” In , 405.

300 For the purpose of this thesis, the term “Independent Christians” is used for Believers of Muslim Background (BMB). In terms of doctrine and practice, most of these BMBs would be considered Evangelical. It is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of BMBs throughout the region, with the greatest concentration being in Iran (100.000), cf. Duane Alexander Miller, “Independents,” 227.

the Middle Eastern Council of Churches (MECC) founded in 1974.\textsuperscript{302} Being the tangible expression of the Christian presence in the Middle East, the Council’s mission is seen as a threefold bridge: “(1) a bridge between Eastern Christians of the region, (2) a bridge between Christians and peoples of other religions in the region, and (3) a bridge between the Middle East churches and Western churches.”\textsuperscript{303} Nevertheless, the challenges are manifold. The first ecclesiological challenge is “to recognize and promote ecclesiological pluralism and accept diversity of ecclesiological models that safeguards unity and welcomes also new Evangelical and Independent (MBB) communities to launch a dialogue on soteriology, eschatology and missiology.”\textsuperscript{304} The second challenge is to “promote together a contextual theology and an appropriate ecumenical model. To face together, beyond denominational affiliations, the Christian presence in the East, to stay faithful to the gospel and the common tradition, without neglecting the new reality of the context, to walk together and witness to Christ together.”\textsuperscript{305}

It is a special challenge for the BMBs to be considered in the ecumenical dialog, because they are treated with suspicion by some of the members of the ecumenical community, but should rather be supported in finding their identity, acceptance in society, finding work, help with raising family and children, leadership formation and theological education. On the other hand they would eventually be most fit to help the ecumenical community with the endeavor of the inter-faith dialog, because of their special insights and experiences with the Islamic community.\textsuperscript{306}


\textsuperscript{304} Gabriel, “Ecclesiology,” 415.

\textsuperscript{305} Gabriel, “Ecclesiology,” 416.

\textsuperscript{306} Miller, “Independents,” 233-234.
Interfaith Dialogue

In observing the inter-religious dialog practiced in the Middle East today, one soon realizes that it is usually a Christian-Muslim dialog leaving outside the third major monotheistic religion, Judaism.\(^\text{307}\) The Christian-Muslim inter-religious relations in the region have a long history. There is, however, a considerable difference between the dialog in antiquity and today. Awad points out that the main goal in the initial phase of the emergence of Islam was to achieve a peaceful and tolerant coexistence between local Christian communities and the arriving Muslims. The second purpose was to achieve a reliable and trustworthy mutual understanding, perception of particularities and exertion of mutual influence.\(^\text{308}\) In contemporary dialog participants go beyond this more pragmatic approach and try to really understand each other – also the differences – and recognizing the mind-set of the other. According to Awad, coexistence without mutual understanding and reciprocal impact is mere survival, just as reciprocal understanding without coexistence is just theory. Only one aspect without the existence of the other, it empties an inter-religious dialog of its core nature and impoverishes its meaning.\(^\text{309}\) Some examples of the more recent dialogs include the Colloquium on Mutual Views and Changing Relations between Christians and Muslims, which convened at the University of Balamand in Lebanon (Aug. 27-29, 1997), the Consultation on Cooperation in Christian-Muslim Studies with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in Beirut (Aug. 29-31, 1997), the dialog “Christians and Muslims Together” organized by the Arab Working Group on Muslim-Christian Dialog in Cairo (Dec. 20, 2001), the International Conference on Muslim Christian Dialog in Khartoum (July 4-6, 2006).


\(^{308}\) Awad, “Inter-religious Relations,” 384.

\(^{309}\) Awad, “Inter-religious Relations,” 385-386.
2007), and the International Conference, entitled “Religion and the Rule of Law in the Near East,” organized by the Royal Scientific Society in Amman (Feb. 27-28, 2008).\(^{310}\) During the three-day visit of the pope to Abu Dhabi, beginning on February 3, 2019, a special interfaith Conference of Human Fraternity was convened, in which the pope met with Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar. Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi, welcomed the pope and the Grand Imam. The conference had at is highlight the signing of a document of fraternity, the Gulf State has declared the year of 2019 the year of tolerance and brought together 700 leaders from more than 12 religions.\(^{311}\)

**Political Dialog**

In August of 1990, Iraq invaded its small, but rich neighbor, Kuwait. An international armed response expelled it from Kuwait, and in the process destroyed much of the Iraqi economy and military. In March of 1991, a few days after the announcement of the Allied powers cease-fire, the Kurds performed an uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan.\(^{312}\) “While the elite Iraqi Republican Guards were regrouping and putting down a Shiite uprising in the south, the Kurdish forces, which had gathered under a coalition of all major Kurdish political parties in Iraq, took over all Kurdish inhabited areas of Iraq, and more.”\(^{313}\) But the victory was in vain, because Kurdistan was retaken after the Shiites were put down in the South. It was then when an immense fight of the Kurds arouse. About half of the Kurds of Iraq fled to Turkish and Iranian borders, over 1 million made it into Iran, and nearly half a million attempted to get

\(^{310}\) Awad, “Inter-religious Relations,” 386.


\(^{312}\) McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 368-373.

\(^{313}\) McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 368-373.
into Turkey. 314 Allied forces were then sent into northern Iraq for the protection of the Kurds. “They also declared the area north of the 36th parallel off limits to the Iraqi air force. As of the end of 1991, this area had grown to include almost 40% of Iraqi Kurdistan, but despite the opportunity to form a de facto Kurdish state after the defeat of Saddam, internal conflicts would continue for yet another decade until a unified parliament could constitute in October of 2002 a federal state for Iraqi Kurdistan.” 315

Due to the historic tragedies of the Kurds, they are living today “as minorities in five independent states: Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and the former Soviet Union.” 316 However, in the Kurdish political culture there are multiple key chasms that must be spanned in order for pan-Kurdish aims to be achieved in these five regions of Kurdistan. The multiple different political leadership styles seem to be predominant in the different regions. “In fact reviewing the character of life in the five regions, their leadership, and their style of conduct is the quickest way of discerning the political challenges for a concerted action or dialog.” 317

Although there are only estimates of 12% of Kurds living among the Iranian population, they are also divided between Kurdistan and the Khurasani territory, which is over 600 miles away. 318 “Regional differences further distinguish those Kurds in the Iranian portions from those in Kurdistan, hampering the development of a unified voice to argue the case of the Kurds in Teheran, in spite of the fact that they outnumber their brothers in the north by far.” 319 The Kurds are strongly influenced by the people of Iran in terms of speech and culture. Therefore it is important to note that there are differences to be found among the

314 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 368-373.
315 Gunter. Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 16-17.
316 Izady, The Kurds, 207.
317 Izady, The Kurds, 207.
318 Izady, The Kurds, 198.
Kurds living in Iran and the Kurdish people living in other countries. Already since the 16th century, the Iranian Kurds have been living in Persian territory. “Many important national figures in past and present Iran have been unassimilated Kurds. They have climbed up the social ladder, however, because they have pursued a pan-Iranian agenda and not a Kurdish one. To do otherwise, would mean quick reprisal and ostracism.”

Today, the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party, which is located in eastern Kurdistan, is representing an elitist force. “The party leaders bear thus an unflattering view of the neighboring Kurds of central, but particularly Northern Kurdistan, as basically hard-minded, bearish characters, barely educated, uncivilized tribal people whose long association with the alien Arab and Turkic cultures has rendered their social behavior an embarrassment and their culture adulterated.” The Kurds living in Iran believe that they are superior to the other Kurds in culture and religion. “But interestingly enough, at the same time, these eastern Kurds look for political leadership from the crude and rough, but also trustworthy, solid, witty, and can-do Kurds of Iraq. The Kurds of southern Iran distance themselves from other Kurds even farther.” Many Kurds of Iran do not see any relevance to invest their cultural and political talent into Kurdistan, because it is seemingly too small. They rather prefer to invest into locations, such as Teheran, Baghdad, Vienna, Paris, or New York.

Over the years, there have been multiple Kurds who held high political positions, and a various number of vice presidents and Iraqi presidents. The development of the Iraqi state in 1932 and the lack of well-established political elite, has put the regime in Baghdad into a position to also choose representatives from other ethnic groups. Since the independence in Bagdad, only the Sunni Arabs held the power, although they represent only 18% of the total

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320 Izady, The Kurds, 198.


322 Izady, The Kurds, 208.
Iraqi population, while the Kurds represent a total of 23.5% of the population. A Kurd can only be placed in higher political power and social standing in Baghdad if being completely supportive of its government.  

In northern Iraqi Kurdistan, the two main parties KDP and PUK are the leading political entities. According to Izady, KDP which is led by Barzani, represents “an ethos embodying the northern Kurdish tradition.” This party is “familial,” with tribal structure that is managed by “local elders” and “community leaders.”  

Barzanis are traditional and religious, with their followers being traditionalist and inward-oriented people. In consulting tribal elders on all-important decisions, they continue the tradition of tribe-based democracy. They treat their followers as members of the same extended family.” The Talabani-led PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) in central Kurdistan in Iraq “represents a more urban, modern, and outward-looking populace, with a strong connection to Southern Kurdistan in Iran. The party is less religious, as is characteristic of these parts of Kurdistan, and its leaders seldom consult local tribal or religious leaders.” PUK considers the KDP and its members from a standpoint of “sophistication and modernism, scorning the tribal, religious, and peasant affinities of their informal northern counterparts.” From 1994 to 1998, these two parties had fought a civil war against each other “and it took the help of the United States in order to bring about a ceasefire between Barzani and Talabani and to encourage them to cooperate in order to bring about a united Kurdistan in Iraq in 2002.”

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323 Izady, The Kurds, 199.
324 Izady, The Kurds, 199.
326 Gunter. Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 247-249.
327 Izady, The Kurds, 207.
328 Gunter. Historical Dictionary of the Kurds, 15-16.
A state or an independent Kurdistan as an idea clashes the most with the political system in Turkey. “While the names Iran, Iraq, and Syria are not ethnic-based country names, Turkey is. By definition, Turkey means ‘the land of the Turks.’ For the Kurds from Turkey to refer to themselves as ‘Turkish Kurds’ is a contradiction in terms. How can a Turk be a Kurd?”

In spite of all challenges and pressures from the Turkish government, McDowall points out that the Kurds who live under the reign of Turkey have developed their own distinct political culture. One of the reasons for such a distinct political culture is the extreme suppression of the communication between the Kurds in Turkey with the rest of the Kurds in other part of Kurdistan. Another significant reason is their “history and geography.” As such, the Kurds who live in Turkey are “novelties” to the other Kurds in other regions and vice versa. It is only now and because of the advent of communication media that the Kurds in Turkey are actually discovering and at the same time being discovered by the Kurds in other regions fellow Kurds. “The difference is neither language nor religion, as they share these with other regions of Kurdistan. Rather it is their outlook—a Mediterranean orientation and tilt toward the West—that has rendered this most populous Kurdish subdivision so different. Most mutual feelings have been those of discovery and curiosity than criticism or praise, including on political and social grounds.”

Abdullah Ocalan, as one of the most important leaders in Western Kurdistan, has recently come to be respected by many Kurds outside Turkey, primarily because of the profound knowledge that the Kurds of other regions have of him or of the political ideology he represents, “but rather because his outlook and methods are exotic in comparison to their own familiar and supposedly failed ones.” Although Ocalan has done little effort in “inter-

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regional politics” to attract Kurds from other regions of Kurdistan outside of his own region in Anatolia, because of the fact that “Anatolia is the origin of over half of all Kurds living today, he could have an easier time achieving a pan-Kurdish political platform than did Barzani.” 333 Additionally, “Ocalan’s Mediterranean political culture and quasi-Western political conduct are fast mythologizing him and his political party in the eyes of the other half of the Kurdish nation that lives outside Anatolia and Turkey.” 334

The view of Syria toward Kurdish identity has ranged from supporting and advocating for the Kurdish identity under the French mandate to equally suppression and deportation of the Kurds by the hand of the independent Syrian government before the reign of Assad dynasty in 1968. 335 “With the beginning of the war in Syria the Kurdish constituency has attempted to establish a Kurdish region in the northern part of the country in spite of the fact that these attempts have been at times violently checked by their northern neighbor, Turkey.” 336

The situation of the Kurds in Soviet Union is different as they can be found “in fragmented pockets, mostly along its borders in the Caucasus and central Asia. The Kurds living in the Armenian and Georgian Republics, a population only in the range of tens of thousands, have traditionally received admirable levels of cultural autonomy. In the Republics of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan they have seen deportations and denial of their separate identity.” 337


334 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 455-460.


In light of the above challenges of diversity, the political dialog faces two challenges: On the one hand there is the danger of ethnic and national assimilation, because of the pressure from the surrounding nations (especially Iran and Turkey that challenge the existence of the Kurdish ethos). On the other hand, there is the danger of a nationalistic over-reaction, because of the very threats of assimilation and marginalization and the continuous pressures exerted on the Kurdish people. For this second challenge the best remedy will be to heed the practices of Yoder: *Ad extra* (Iran, Turkey, Iraq), a meaningful economic *modus vivendi* has to be negotiated (second practice), *ad infra*, in the relationship between the tribes, parties and religions equality and the dignity of the individual groups have to be respected (third and fourth practice), while the importance of dialog (fifth practice) will be paramount for a life in prosperity within the boarders of KRG and beyond! In spite of the negative assessment of the present situation by Stephanous (“The plain political reality is that, in the Middle East, the West preaches democracy but supports autocracy.”), the author recognizes also the importance of the international community in this dialog.338

CONCLUSION

We have found that the five practices of John Howard Yoder (ethics, economics, equality, sociology and dialog) provide a useful framework for the development of a Christian Kurdish political theology, if couched in the language that takes into consideration the Kurdish Islamic context.

The first aspect of the first practice leading towards a Christian Kurdish political theology is reconciliation. This is of special importance, because Kurdistan has witnessed many massacres over the last two centuries. Since several of these massacres were directed also against Christian communities, it is important to start the process of reconciliation among the Christian communities of Kurdistan. If these endeavors among the Christian communities are successful, they can serve as a paradigm and incentive for all the different communities of Kurdistan, such as Sunnites, Shiites, Alevites, Yezidis, or Jews.

The second aspect of the first practice of a Christian Kurdish political theology emphasized that the concept of God serves as the underlying principle for a moral theology, be it in the form of the Christian moral theology of a *Regel Christi*, the Jewish moral theology of *Halakha* or the Islamic moral theology of *Sharia*.

The second practice established the importance of economics for a CKPT. Proper economic procedures should be modeled within the context of Christian communities. These paradigmatic economic enterprises, e.g. NGOs, could then be implemented within the Kurdish society at large.

While the first practice has established the importance of the concept of God for a moral theology, this third practice needs to undergird the principle of equality, because of the impasse of Islamic theology that does not transcend the concept of *dhimmitude* and extreme nationalism that resists the concept of ethnic equality. Only a Christian Kurdish political
theology that propagates full equality will serve all the different groups, tribes, religions, parties and genders of Kurdistan well. In order to guarantee this third practice the concept of Sharia and national laws need to be perfected by a civil constitution that assures equality for all and maintains a non-violent approach.

Also the fourth practice re-iterates that the church needs to portray a new group dynamic that emphasizes the dignity of everyone, breaking every hierarchical structure. Based (1) on a moral law that (2) is expressed in an open economy and (3) a political structure of equality, CKPT must argue for a dynamic citizenship, which is based on equality and is developed through coexistence, where everyone can be both governor and governed and where the empowerment of both men and women is guaranteed.

The last practice emphasized that a CKPT needs to propagate principles of dialog that require one to even listen to the adversary. This dialog needs to be portrayed within the Christian churches, in ecumenical deliberations, interfaith talks, but also in political and economic deliberations. It should start *ad infra*, where in the relationship between the tribes, parties and religions equality and the dignity of the individuals has to be developed, and should then continue *ad extra* with a dialog with the Sunnite Turkish and Shiite Iranian neighbors, where a meaningful political and economic *modus vivendi* has to be developed. Skillful dialog will be the key for a life in prosperity within the boarders of KRG and beyond!
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