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Jamil Akhtar and Ismail Latif Hacinebioglu

Covenant and Law in Paul and the Qur'ān: Towards a Trilateral Abrahamic Dialogue

Zaveza in postava pri Pavlu in v Koranu: na poti k tristranskemu abrahamskemu dialogu

Abstract: This article is a comparative theological reflection on the biblical covenant and the law of God in Pauline theology and the Qur'ān, situated within the broader horizon of post-*Nostra aetate* interfaith dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Drawing on modern Pauline scholarship, Qur'ānic studies, and interreligious theology, it argues that law functions in both traditions not as mere legalistic obligation but as a gift embedded within a covenantal relationship marked by divine initiative and oriented toward moral transformation. While acknowledging significant doctrinal divergences – particularly regarding Christology and prophethood – the article identifies structural convergences in the treatment of righteousness, Abrahamic faith, and communal vocation. On this basis, it proposes a trilateral theological framework capable of sustaining rigorous Jewish–Christian–Muslim dialogue without compromising confessional integrity. *The Document on Human Fraternity* (2019) is also considered as a complementary contemporary resource that articulates shared ethical and relational foundations among the Abrahamic traditions.

Keywords: Abraham, covenant, dialogue, law, Paul, Qur'ān, righteousness

Izvleček: *Članek predstavlja primerjalno teološko razmišljanje o svetopisemski zavezi in Božji postavi v Pavlovi teologiji in Koranu, umeščeno v širši okvir medverskega dialoga med Judi, kristjani in muslimani po sprejetju koncilskega dokumenta* Nostra aetate. *Članek, ki črpa iz sodobnih raziskav o Pavlu, koranskih študij in medverske teologije, trdi, da postava v obeh tradicijah ne deluje zgolj kot legalistična obveznost, ampak kot dar, vpet v zavezniško razmerje, zaznamovano z Božjo pobudo in usmerjeno v moralno preobrazbo. Čeprav priznava pomembna doktrinalna odstopanja – zlasti glede kristologije in preroštva – članek identificira strukturne podobnosti v obravnavanju pravičnosti, abrahamske vere in skupnostnega poklica. Na tej podlagi predlaga tristranski teološki okvir, ki omogoča vzdrževanje poglobljenega judovsko-krščansko-muslimanskega dialoga brez ogrožanja posamezne verske integritete.* Dokument o človeškem bratstvu *(2019) je obravnavan kot dopolnilni sodobni vir, ki izraža skupne etične in odnosne temelje med abrahamskimi tradicijami.*

Ključne besede: *Abraham, zaveza, dialog, postava, Pavel, Koran, pravičnost*

Introduction

There is no theological concept that has stronger effects – and sometimes tensions – on interreligious communication between Jews, Christians and Muslims than law and covenant. In most of the history of the church, Paul's attack on »works of the law« (Gal 2–3; Rom 3–4) was interpreted as a total rejection of Judaism, and thus as a call to supersessionism (*the belief/idea that the New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant*), which modern theology has condemned, and for the most part abandoned. Since the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra aetate* (1965), Catholic teaching declared a new era by affirming the continued relevance of Israel's covenant in the divine economy, beginning a truly new era in Jewish–Christian theological engagement (Gregerman 2018, 137–140). This conciliar turn has coincided with significant advancements in Pauline scholarship as interpreters now locate Paul further in the context of Second Temple Judaism and read his theology of justification as an argument within Judaism concerning inclusion in the covenant rather than a rejection of Torah per se (Novenson 2024, 45–78; Thiessen 2023, 12–34; Barclay 2023, 185–214).

In the meantime, modern Jewish theology has affirmed the enduring nature of the covenant of Israel and rejected Christian interpretations that downplay the importance of Torah (Soulen 2022, 109–142). Such developments have resulted in a paradigm of dialogue that sees covenant as God's faithfulness and law as the lived expression in response to God's work of faithfulness.

But there's still a significant gap. While Jewish–Christian dialogue is quite mature, Islamic theology is rarely integrated into covenant-and-law discussion in Christian systematic theology. The absence is very telling since the Qur'ān repeatedly uses the words *mīthāq* (covenant) and *sharīʿa* as directions to the divine decrees (Q 5:48). More recent scholarship on the Qur'ān has pointed to the relational and moral aspects of these concepts in the wider context of scriptural argumentation in Late Antiquity (Neuwirth 2019, 1–4.22.117–118.136). To fill this gap, this research asks whether one can conceptualize Pauline and Qur'ānic theology of law as structurally parallel covenantal theology, thus establishing a foundation for trilateral – Jewish, Christian and Muslim – theological dialogue, based on divine initiative and moral transformation.

1 Covenant and Law in contemporary Jewish–Christian dialogue

A theological reconfiguration of covenant and law has had a significant impact on the renewal of Jewish–Christian dialogue in the modern world. A new phase began with the promulgation of *Nostra aetate* (1965), which affirmed the ongoing role of Israel in the divine salvific economy, while also critiquing previous exegetical tendencies, especially those associated with pre–New Perspective interpretations of Paul, which emphasized a sharp contrast between Law and Gospel, creating the impression of strong discontinuity between Judaism and early Christianity (Cunningham 2015, 45–78; Suzuki 2025, 107–112). Recent research confirms that *Nostra aetate* was not simply a gesture of diplomacy, but a structural paradigm shift that required Christians to rethink the covenant and its enduring validity (Cunningham 2015, 80–102; Suzuki 2025, 108–115). The indissolubility of God's covenant with Israel has become a fundamental principle of the postconciliar Catholic theology.

Along with this conciliar reorientation, there has been considerable rethinking of Paulinian theology. In the past, both Protestant and Catholic understandings of Paul tended to see his condemnation of »works of the law« as a rejection of Torah itself. In contrast, however, modern Pauline scholarship has restored the dimension of continuity by firmly placing Paul within the context of Second Temple Judaism. This trajectory was pioneered by E. P. Sanders (1977, 420–442), who has argued that Second Temple Judaism was not a legalistic seeking of merit before God, but a »covenantal nomism« – the belief that God's people were taken into God's covenant by grace, and then kept in it by obedience. James D. G. Dunn (2018, 183–241) further expanded this model, suggesting that Paul's »works of the law« were more specifically ethnic markers that helped define ethnic boundaries rather than moral striving. N. T. Wright (2009, 60–95; 2013, 836–1042) located Pauline justification in Israel's story of exile and restoration, and read Paul's theology as fulfillment, not in terms of covenantal categories. The focus on continuity, as in more recent studies such as Novenson (2024, 45–78) and Bird et al. (2023, 1–28), also makes us aware that the relationship between the two had been complex and dynamic, and not always easy to draw clear boundaries around, as Boyarin (2004, 1–21) and Lieu (2004, 11–29) showed in their explorations of the »parting of the ways«. The understanding of Paul's theology of justification

as an intra-Jewish discussion on covenantal inclusion has thus grown. In Paul, as Barclay (2023, 185–214) claims, divine grace does not render covenantal obligation null, but rather refines, extends and transforms it into something communal and pneumatological.

Parallel developments in Jewish theology have enhanced this dialogue. Soulen (2022, 109–142) decried the need for Christian theology to break free from »structural supersessionism« and embrace the ongoing covenantal call of Israel. Levenson (2023, 78–110) expressed covenant as a living relationship, built upon divine faithfulness and moral responsibility. This leads to a dialogical paradigm in which law is continually recognized as a gift within grace rather than its opposite.

Historical consciousness has also been involved in this reconfiguration. Questions of this nature are no longer purely exegetical, but ethical and ecclesial, and have been made deeply apparent by the disastrous consequences of misinterpretations of covenantal theology (Heschel 2021, 1–28) in post-Shoah times. In the overall development of modern Jewish–Christian scholarship, a relational and covenantal understanding of divine commandment, that is, seeing commandment as participation in divine faithfulness instead of burdensome obligation has prevailed. The shift in the dialogue between two states provides the conceptual basis for broadening covenantal reflection to the wider Abrahamic context, including Islamic theology.

2 Pauline theology of Law and Covenant

The theology of law and covenant in Paul is at the heart of the current issues of Christian identity and Jewish–Christian relations. In Galatians as well as Romans, interpretations throughout the centuries have seen Paul as introducing a sort of break between Gospel and Torah, reinforcing a dichotomy between law and grace which has captivated the Western theological imagination. The view of Paul as depicted here has been significantly challenged by more recent scholarship, which has placed Paul in the covenantal world of Second Temple Judaism. Paul is not leaving Torah behind but rather redefining what it will mean in the new context

of the God of Israel's purposes (Novenson 2024, 45–78; Thiessen 2023, 12–34).

The theme of Paul's argument is the Abrahamic covenant. In Galatians 3–4, Paul argues that the promise to Abraham theologically precedes, and in fact is the basis for the Mosaic law, and that the basis for righteousness is not ethnic or ritual, but God's action in first promising it. Within this framework of argumentation, the law is not repudiated as a theological mistake but understood as a subordinate within the salvation-historical context of promise and fulfillment, as Pitta (2009, 181–239) and Dunn (2012, 183–241) show. The law is thus a kind of *paidagōgos* (Gal 3:24) – a custodial guide in effect only for a specific era of salvation history, and limited, but not rendered invalid by the coming of faith in Christ. This salvation-historical subordination does not render the law inherently bad; rather, it locates it within the historical narrative that moves it from promise to fulfillment through Torah.

Paul's overall argument in Romans advances this covenantal logic. Starting from his first theses in Rom 1:16-17 and 3:21, via his subordinate arguments, Paul reaches a Christological climax in Rom 10:4, where the phrase *telos nomou* can be read teleologically, that is, Christ as the goal at which the law was aimed, not in purely terminative senses (Dunn 2018, 589–591; Wright 2013, 1174–1177; Celarc 2019, 441–456; Aletti 1990, 195–218). The argumentative structure, as it has been demonstrated by rhetorical analyses, substantiates Paul's denial of a rejection of the law as such, but rather an interpretation of it within a salvation-historical and covenantal context that finds its apex in Christ.

Barclay's discussion of divine grace helps to further explain this Pauline dynamic. In his research into the »perfection« of grace, Barclay (2023, 185–214) suggests that Paul's radicalness in this gift is to disconnect it from any previous human effort; however, this is not in diminution of the moral change that grace brings. Grace establishes a new community: a community whose life is nourished and animated by the Spirit (Dahlke 2024, 115–118). Likewise, Gaventa (2016, 78–102) highlights the apocalyptic character of Paul's theology: that God's saving activity in Christ is the beginning of a new creation – a different way of being related to God – that is constructed across ethnic lines, yet is rooted in the narrative of Israel's God.

We also find a reexamination of the language of »works of the law« with its precision. Thiessen (2023, 45–78) has demonstrated that this phrase does not mean »moral striving« in general, but specifically practices that constituted »boundary markers« for ethnic identity: circumcision, dietary laws, and the observance of the Sabbath. Paul attacks only the limitation of the covenantal inclusion in Torah and not Torah itself. How then can Paul say that the law is holy and that the commandment is holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7:12), and say that righteousness is now revealed without the law? (Rom 3:21) The solution is not contradiction, but salvation-historical differentiation: In Christ, the function of the law as the giver of boundaries is relativized, and its purpose is fulfilled.

This pneumatological reinterpretation of the law can be seen in a number of important texts in Paul. In Rom 8:2-4, Paul writes about the law of the Spirit of life freeing believers from the law of sin and death so that the »righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit«. The law is not contrary to God's promises but was instead preparatory (Gal 3:21-25). Gal 5:16-18 provides a picture of life »in the Spirit« as a way in which the law's deepest desire is fulfilled. Hays (1989, 32–41), Gorman (2022, 241–278), Martyn (1997, 354–406), and Wright (2013, 1036–1042) all made different arguments that the Spirit in Paul is the transformative power by which covenantal faithfulness is made possible and the law's ethical requirements are fulfilled.

So that is not to say that Pauline theology does away with covenant, nor does it do away with law. It re-christologizes Torah and reinterprets it pneumatologically: covenantal loyalty is to be understood pneumatologically in terms of participation in Christ. Law is essential to God's purposes but has a new orientation in the context of the universalized horizon of Abraham. This reconfiguration of covenant provides an important way in which to engage theologically with the Qur'ānic understanding of divine law in comparative terms.

3 Covenant and divine law in the Qur'ān

Covenant and divine law as understood in the Qur'ānic context are two of the significant principles of structuring Islamic theology. The term *mīthāq* (covenant) is mentioned many times to describe the relationship of God and man and, in particular, between God and the Children of Israel. In Q 2:40 God speaks to the Children of Israel: »O Children of Israel, remember My favor which I bestowed upon you and fulfill My covenant upon you – I will fulfill My covenant upon you – and fear only Me.« In Q 2:83, the covenant with Israel is defined in terms of specific, tangible, moral duties to be performed: »Remember when We made the covenant with the Children of Israel: worship none but God; do good to the parents, to the relatives, to orphans, and to the poor; speak kindly to people; perform the prayer and give alms.« The covenant is connected to the requirement of hearing/obeying in Q 5:7: »And remember God's blessing upon you and His covenant, by which He bound you when you said, 'We hear and we obey.'« The texts presented here make it clear that *mīthāq* in the Qur'ān is not a juridical contract but a relation as an outcome of divine initiative and human ethical response.

This covenantal language is being read in the context of the last half century of scholarship that has shed light on the Late Antique world in which it functions. Neuwirth (2019, 1–4.22.117–118.136) demonstrates that the Qur'ān participates in a shared scriptural heritage with Jewish and Christian traditions of the Late Antique period, engaging biblical covenantal narratives through a process of reception and re-articulation. The Qur'ān does not annul the covenant nor replace it with something new; instead, it means that God establishes a covenant with the people, man forgets it, then God does so again, man forgets, then God does so again, and so on and so on, and His mercy (*raḥma*) continues to remain. Reynolds (2010, 2.36.238–239.244–245) further emphasizes that the Qur'ān's interaction with the biblical material is an act of »assumption«, »clarification«, and »reconfiguration«; that is, it assumes the divine origin of these earlier covenants while also providing the definitive restatement of them in the Qur'ān.

Many important Qur'ānic terms relating to the concept of covenant and law are quite decidedly relational and ethical. The word *hudā* (guidance)

is found throughout the Qur'ān and is its goal of revelation, for example, »This is the Book: There is no doubt in it, a guidance for those conscious of God« (Q 2:2). *Taqwā*, which is often translated as »piety« or »God-consciousness«, is not a legalistic observance but rather an inner attitude of the entire individual towards God. Sinai (2023, 88–89.515–516.720–724), in his crucial dictionary of important Qur'ānic terminology, explains that *taqwā* is a state of constant awareness of God's will that infuses moral actions and social relations. Likewise, in Q 2:177, *birr* (righteousness or moral goodness) is not defined simply in the light of ritual observance but rather in the light of belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and the giving of wealth, even though one loves it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, and those who ask; and the freeing of slaves; and the establishing of prayer and giving of *zakāh*; and the fulfilling of promises when one promises; and patience in poverty and hardship. It is clear from this text that Qur'ānic law is directed towards transforming the entire person ethically in a covenantal relationship with God.

Another example of the teleological nature of God's law in the Qur'ān is the concept of *sharīʾa*. The term, often translated as »law«, has a wide semantic field that includes a way or path of life-giving. Kamali (2008, 14–28) explains that classical Islamic jurisprudence understands *sharīʿa* through the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* – the objectives of Islamic law – which include the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, and which orient legal reasoning toward justice, welfare, and human flourishing. As March (2019, 45–78) points out, modern Islamic thought has further evolved this teleological approach and sees the *sharīʾa* as a moral and social attitude rather than just a penal code. It is profoundly clear from the Qur'ān itself that there is a variety of normatively ordained ways (*shirʾa*) and laws (*minhāj*) for the various communities to which God's prophets were sent: »For each of you We have appointed a law (*shirʾa*) and a way (*minhāj*). And if God had willed, He could have made you one community, but He intended to test you in what He has given you; so race to do good. To God you will all return.« (Q 5:48) This verse has been the subject of much interest in the scholarly world, for it is a Qur'ānic account of the various communal reactions to a single divine will (Sinai 2023, 138.406–407.704–705) and hence a Qur'ānic justification for inter-religious reflection.

The figure of Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*) plays a pivotal role in the Qur'ānic covenantal vision. The Qur'ān claims in Q 3:67 that Abraham was not a Jew or Christian but instead a '*ḥanīf*' (pure monotheist), a Muslim, and not of the polytheists. Abraham as a pre-sectarian monotheist is a theological tool within the Qur'ānic presentation of the monotheist as proof of the unity of God's covenantal initiative in spite of historical particularity, as Neuwirth (2019, 401–403) points out. Apart from the verbal sense of »surrender«, Abraham's covenant with God (Q 2:124-129) sets the paradigm for all authentic relationships between God and man as one of faithful surrender. In addition, Zellentin (2013, 1–32) demonstrates that the legal material of the Qur'ān is in close dialogue with Rabbinic and Christian legal traditions in the world of Late Antiquity and that Islamic covenantal law is a part of a rich tradition of scriptural legal reasoning found within these other legal spheres and that is also parallel to the engagement of Torah with the law of Paul.

The covenant in the Qur'ān is thus a form of divine law that is not arbitrary legislation but one that is all about a path of guidance (*hudā*) in the context of mercy (*raḥma*) and is aiming towards ethical transformation. Obedience is not mechanical submission but a harmonization of the entire person (intellect, will, and affect) to conscious submission to God's will. Thus, the law is a living expression of covenantal faithfulness embodying communal living in the sovereignty of God. This covenantal and teleological view of *sharīʿa* is a substantial theological equivalent to Paul's reformulations of law in the Abrahamic context.

4 Comparative theological analysis: convergences and tensions

Any rigorous comparison of Pauline and Qur'ānic theologies of covenant and law must be guided by a methodology that is neither one of forced harmonization of traditions that diverge from each other nor one that assumes that structural parallels have nothing meaningful to offer in terms of insights. As the practice of sustained theological learning across traditions, comparative theology is not the superficial identification of similarities, but rather each tradition is deepened and enriched through deep engagement with the other, with no erasure of difference, as argued by Francis X. Clooney (2010, 1–18; 2022, 24–49). Marianne Moyaert (2011, 45–89) also

argues that the core of interreligious hospitality is the balance of openness to the other and true adherence to tradition. In the context of this methodological approach, convergences and tensions between the Pauline and Qur'ānic conceptions of divine laws can be responsibly assessed.

The first, and perhaps most basic convergence, is the primacy of divine initiative. In Paul, it is the faithfulness of God (*dikaiosynē theou*, Rom 3:21-26) in the covenant that provides a basis for righteousness, which, as faithfulness in the teleological sense of Rom 10:4 (Christ as the *telos* of the law), is a faithfulness of continuity and fulfillment rather than simple termination. God's action in Christ in no way cancels the covenantal story of Israel but only brings it to its intended goal. God's guidance (*hudā*) and mercy (*raḥma*) are prior to and a constituent of the human covenantal response: God's sovereign action is the irreplaceable basis of all human moral action. But as Burrell (2011, 89–112) has noted, both Christian and Muslim traditions hold that God's will to command is not independent of God's generosity: law is not self-generating and independent but is the expression of God's covenantal love that is already his gift. While there may be great differences in the theological expression of this shared affirmation of divine initiative, there is a real structural similarity.

The second big convergence is in moral transformation. The pneumatological vision of Paul – »If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit« (Gal 5:25) and »The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death« (Rom 8:2) – suggests that obedience is not an external compliance but an inward renewal. The purpose of a covenantal life in Paul isn't the doing of legal things; it's a people becoming like God in their character, in terms of their love, justice, and faithfulness. The Qur'ānic focus on *taqwā* (as outlined in Q 2:177), which has a detailed explanation of righteous actions in relation to God and neighbor in this verse, is, likewise, a description of obedience that is not merely legal but rather the whole person living a life of conscious faithfulness before God. As Clooney (2022, 89–110) shows, these structural resonances in moral anthropology – the directionality of the bodily subject toward change in response to the gift of the divine – truly offer a starting ground for comparative theological reflection.

The character of Abraham continues this merging. Paul uses the example of Abraham's faith to address the issue of the Gentiles' relationship to God, claiming that it is a model of the right way to react to God's promise (Gal 3:6-9) and that Abraham is »the father of all who believe« for both Jew and Gentile. Abraham's example of Islam in the original sense of surrendering to the one God is evident in Q 3:67 and Q 2:124-129, in which he takes on the covenantal stance recommended by the Qur'ān for all humankind. In both texts, Abraham is a prime example of a »faithful response« to divine initiative, a pre-legal, pre-sectarian theological resource available for the basis of dialogue in the midst of confessional particularity (Neuwirth 2019, 401–403).

But it is the tensions that are crucial and cannot be ignored. Paul's covenantal theology is inherently Christological: being a part of the covenantal community is a matter of faith in and fellowship with Christ, whose death and resurrection Paul sees as the culmination of the Israelite covenantal story and the foundation of the new creation. Rom 3:21-26, the righteousness of God made available »through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe«, is the way to describe the covenantal community, which is defined by participation in Christ. By contrast, Islamic theology is not interested in thinking about prophetic mediation in the sense of the proclamation and modeling of submission to God (*islām*), especially the prophetic ministry of Muhammad, and categorically rejects the Incarnation. The Qur'ān itself says, »Say: He is God, the One; God, the Eternal Refuge; He neither begets nor is born« (Q 112:1-3) – words that have traditionally been taken to be a denial of the very Christological claims that are central to Pauline soteriology.

These are not so much differences in language but differences in theology, in what God is like, in Jesus, and in how people are saved. In post-supersessionist theology, Ochs (2011, 132–162) insists that the claims of Christians about Christ must be expressed relationally, that is, in a way that does not foreclose other traditions' covenantal integrity, but the methodological prescription cannot heal the divide with regard to the claims. Likewise, when it comes to the question of covenantal inclusion, Paul makes the promise universal through faith in Christ; the Qur'ān makes the promise universal without a sacramental means of access, through submission (*islām*). These different soteriological frameworks are not differences

of mere words but rather theological differences that cannot be downplayed with reference to common terms.

A rigorous comparative theological analysis therefore yields the following: structural convergences at the level of divine initiative, covenantal fidelity, and moral transformation coexist with substantive divergences at the level of Christological mediation, the nature of revelation, and the understanding of fulfillment. Both dimensions need to be maintained at the same time. True dialogue doesn't need to be the conjunction of doctrines but the enrichment of understandings in a condition of maintained difference, as Moyaert (2011, 78–102) suggests. The knowledgeable contrast is a promising way of engaging in dialogue between the mature bilateral Jewish-Christian dialogue and a broader encounter of Abrahamic theology.

5 Toward a trilateral framework for dialogue

This analysis indicates that covenant and law, when given relationally, not polemically, might be seen as a common theological lexicon that is not a language of mutual exclusion but of structured engagement across difference for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. But any dialogue model between three sides must be methodologically transparent and theologically truthful on the basis on which engagement takes place.

A first principle is to think of the covenant in terms of a category of divine fidelity rather than confessional rivalry. In contemporary interreligious theology, it is taught that dialogue must not be without commitment to doctrine but in a disciplined mode of expression towards the religious other. Cornille (2008, 9–34) sees the values of interreligious engagement as being humility, commitment, and interconnection. In covenantal theology, this involves affirming one's own interpretation of God's election and also recognizing that God's faithfulness, simply by being God's faithfulness, cannot be captured by any particular historical form of expression. This is in line with Hofmann's (2020, 18–27) claim that Christian theological affirmations need to be formulated in ways that do not lead to relativism or exclusivism, or with Cornille's assertion that commitment to one's own tradition is the very precondition of genuine theological exchange.

In this context, the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, in 2019, is a valuable contemporary resource. The document seeks to express common ethical and spiritual principles for the followers of the Abrahamic faiths: justice, mercy, human dignity, and respect for creation – the four themes of the document – which don't need to be eradicated from their particularity. It is a working example of the idea that covenantal traditions can cooperate based on moral commonalities – and hold on to theological identities (Francis and Al-Tayyeb 2019). In this document, the dialogical impulse is expanded to include more than just the Jewish–Christian context and is based on shared ethical essentials.

A second principle is that law must be recovered as an ethical vocation in a shared Abrahamic moral framework. Abraham (2023, 41–44) states that interreligious theology needs to focus on pneumatological and ethical aspects that allow for working together without losing diversity. In both Pauline and Qur'ānic paradigms, communities are created under the divine law to do justice, mercy, and obedience. Thus, a trilateral model provides a basis for convergent moral obligations from monotheistic piety and celebrates the unique covenantal ways in which these obligations are formed. When juxtaposed with the Pauline declaration that »the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,'« (Gal 5:14) the Qur'ānic command to »race to do well« (Q 5:48) without regard to communal differences indicates a common moral motivation that can be used to sustain joint action on issues of justice, human dignity, and care for creation.

A third principle is that theological particularity cannot be dissolved in dialogue. To bring irreducible claims to a lowest common denominator does not lead to real unity but to a diminished theology that is sufficient for no tradition, Clooney (2022, 110–132) warns. The Qur'ānic assertion of the prophethood of Muhammad and the Pauline one of the unique mediatorial roles of Christ are true theological differences, which are not at all easily harmonized without doing violence to both traditions. D'Costa (2022, 98–134) does not suggest that there can be no conversation between the different ones, but rather they are the condition of the difference in which conversation becomes theologically significant. When those involved in a dialogue are blocking their deepest commitments, it is

not really a dialogue, but rather negotiated silence. It is not a synthesis of doctrines but the grammar of engagement, which would enable the use of common signposts in this communication – the action of God, moral change, and universal calling – while leaving the differences open for ongoing discussion.

In this sense, there is no homogenization of doctrine in a trilateral covenantal-legal framework. Rather, this framework provides a grammar of action that is built on the notions of divine initiative, moral change, and shared vocation yet does not involve giving over to the confessional. As interlocutors, the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians can bring historical, ethical, and contemporary questions to the one God whose fidelity – understood in different ways – is the ground of their respective covenantal identities.

Conclusion

This article argues that Pauline and Qur'ānic theologies of law are best understood as covenantal frameworks animated by divine initiative and oriented toward moral transformation. By moving beyond supersessionism and recovering the enduring significance of Israel's covenant, contemporary Jewish–Christian scholarship has already reconfigured Christian interpretations of Torah, demonstrating that law in Paul functions not as a theological obstacle but as a gift relativized and reoriented within the saving purposes of God. When Islamic theology is introduced into this conversation, significant structural convergences emerge: in both Paul and the Qur'ān, divine law is a relational gift constituting communities called to righteousness under the sovereignty of the one God. These convergences are grounded in careful textual engagement – with Pauline texts and Qur'ānic texts – and in dialogue with contemporary scholarship on both traditions.

Theological differences – especially regarding Christology, prophethood, and soteriological mediation – are significant and must be stated with clarity rather than minimized. The Pauline identification of Christ as the *telos* of the law and the Qur'ānic affirmation of Muhammad's prophetic finality represent irreducibly different theological claims that cannot

be harmonized without distorting both traditions. Nevertheless, these differences need not foreclose conversation. When covenant and law are received as expressions of divine fidelity rather than instruments of communal self-definition against the other, they can function as a structuring theological grammar for sustained and rigorous Jewish–Christian–Muslim engagement. The documents of Catholic teaching from *Nostra aetate* to the *Document on Human Fraternity* suggest that this expanded trilateral conversation is not only possible but theologically necessary in the contemporary world.

Data Availability Statement

As this study is based on a theoretical approach, no new research data were generated or analyzed.

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