

GOD

Conflicting Faith-Claims in Islamic and Christian Religious Frameworks

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Islam as a redemptive truth and also as one of the greatest vehicles of knowledge of the absolute Real is originated in the paradigmatic Abrahamic tradition of monotheism. It shares with Judaism and Christianity the common belief that the only and One God unveils himself through revelation and speaks through Scriptures he has revealed to his prophets. Islam lays claim to a common distinction existing among all theistic communities that it is in possession of the Word of God. The faithful are required to respond to the Word of God with submission to the purpose and will of God in absolute obedience and trust.

The term used in Islam for belief in one God is '*Tauhid*'. As the central doctrine of Islamic faith, *Tauhid* insists on the unconditional commitment to the idea of the Divine unity and uniqueness. It denounces everything opposed to the oneness of God. According to the Qur'an, everything belonging to the polytheistic world-view, e.g., idols, deities, gods, goddesses, divine associates, cultic practices, are an 'abomination of Satan' (5:92). The Qur'an rejects polytheism and all cultic religions with contempt and reprobation. The positive and blissful aspect of *Tauhid* is that it serves as a moral and redemptive principle, which is believed to save the believer at the hour of death. The highest reward for belief in *Tauhid* is the beatific vision of God in the hereafter. Prophet Mohammad is quoted to have said,

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“Whoever dies knowing that there is no divinity except God enters Paradise.”¹ Faith in *Tauhid* at mystical level is known to bring salvation to the believer here and now through contemplative union with the real One. For Sufi masters, the term *Tauhid* carries a magical significance. They emphasize that it includes all levels of knowledge — especially the level of knowledge, which pierces the illusory web of plurality. To believe in *Tauhid* is to go beyond the duality of subject and object and to enter into the realm of unitive consciousness (*al-jam*). The starting point of the unitive consciousness is prayerful remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah in all its forms. The Sufi masters claim: He who occupies himself in repeating silently ‘*La ilaha illa-llah*’, his eye of the heart is opened. And he is endowed with supernatural knowledge. His soul is illumined and gifted with wisdom and indescribable happiness.

In the Islamic tradition, the main source of sure and unerring knowledge of the One with its absoluteness is the Holy Qur’an — the Word of God revealed in Scriptural form to the Prophet Mohammad through angelic intermediary. To understand the full scope of the Qur’anic message, one needs to follow the path of the prophet and his disciples and followers. The prophet has clearly ordained, “Thou shalt believe in one God, in His angels, His revealed books, His messengers, the resurrection after death, and His determining of Good and evil.”²

The fundamental faith-claims professed in the Islamic creed are not new in the perspective of Semitic religions. These faith-claims, especially the claim regarding belief in the absolute oneness of God and the role of apostles in communicating God’s message constituting the central theme cannot be ignored. Islam’s significant features such as ideological perspective, historical background, and the cultural context also need to be taken into account which naturally reflects the commonality of views with Jewish Christian faiths.

Islam is of the view that since all revelations spring from the same transcendent divine source, they all affirm the unique oneness of God. Though language, environment, and cultural aspects may differ, the essential characteristics of the message

are the same. Hence, it is wrong to suppose that pre-Islamic prophetic faiths revealed the truth other than what Islam came to preach. Islam accedes to what other prophets claimed. But the problem with the available record of earlier revelations is that it is incomplete and some mistakes in it have crept in through human error. Further, the record has been subjected to a lot of editorial changes. Hence, it is argued that since the previous revelations had lost their authenticity, Muhammad's mission was a logical as well as spiritual necessity. A Christian or Jewish detractor may reject this argument as for him it will be a self-justifying claim of the Muhammadan message. Huston Smith seems to agree to this argument in some way when he says: "It was the same command that has fallen earlier on Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah and Jesus."³ The Qur'an testifies this thesis by providing us with a statement: "There is no change to the Words of God" (10:64). The same essential message is reiterated whenever revelation establishing a new religion takes place.

It is important to take notice of the fact that most of the Qur'anic concepts, narratives and stories belong to the Judeo-Christian background and are essentially meant to convey the same message, *viz.* the prophetic warning of a coming Day of Judgement. The overall tone of the Qur'anic doctrine of salvation, like that of Christianity is universal in character. Its content is neither ethnocentric nor elitist. The redemption of soul will be available for all the believers who are God-fearing and firmly believe in the doctrine of *Tauhid* and save themselves from *shirk*. Islam like Judaism attaches great importance to the connection between religion and Law (*shariah*). "Law is thought of, not as a product of human intelligence and adaptation to changing social needs and ideals, but of divine inspiration and hence immutable."⁴ The Qur'an shares the agenda with Judaism in denouncing polytheism and idolatry in all its forms. Strictly following this spirit, the Qur'an also rejects the idea of incarnation of God in human form. The Christian beliefs that Jesus is the Son of God and a member of the Holy Trinity have been declared in the Qur'an as sheer blasphemy and unpardonable polytheism. "... say not Trinity, desist ... for God

is one God" (4:171). "Say: He is God, the One and the Only" (112:1-4). The Islamic revelation emphasizes the belief in the Absolute unity and otherness of God.

Despite its insistence on conviction in the absolute Oneness of God, and strict rejection of the doctrines of incarnation and Trinity, Islamic attitude towards Jesus Christ and Christianity is essentially sympathetic and is closer to Christian teachings.⁵ Geoffrey Parrinder has explored the depth of this attitude by writing a detailed chapter on this topic in his book 'Encountering World Religions'. Some of his views are:

"In the Koran Jesus receives a great number of honourable titles than any other figure of the past. Moses and Abraham may be mentioned more times, because of the narratives in which they appear, but Jesus is more highly honoured in the Koran and countless mystical writings later. The Koran calls Jesus a 'sign', a mercy, a 'witness', and an 'example'. He is called by his name Jesus under the Arabic form of Isa, by the titles messiah (Christ) and Son of Mary, and by names such as Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word, and Spirit of God. Three chapters of the Koran are named after reference to Jesus, and he is mentioned in fifteen chapters and ninety-three verses. He is always spoken of with reverence without a breath of criticism, for he is held to be a sinless prophet and the Christ."

"Mary the mother of Jesus, is the only woman called by her proper name in the Koran and chapter thirteen is named after her name Maryam giving one of the two accounts of the annunciation and birth of Jesus from Mary. Other women are mentioned in the Koran but they are not named, such as the wives of Noah, Pharaoh and Zacharia, and the Queen of Sheba. Mary is spoken as preserved from Satan and defended against attacks of scandal, and like the prophets she came to be regarded as sinless. According to the Koranic story Mary was preserved by Zachariah in the temple and she was fed supernaturally. She gave birth to Jesus away from

home, under a tree, and when she was accused of impropriety the Child Jesus himself spoke in her defence from the cradle.”⁶

The Qur’an also speaks of healing miracles of Jesus, that is, how he healed the blind, cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead. It shows Jesus ‘creating figures like birds from clay, and breathing into them so that they become birds, by the permission of God. The infant Jesus is presented as speaking from the cradle. Jesus is reported to have asked God to send a table from heaven, as a feast for his disciples. The Gospel in the Qur’an is called Injil, Evangel, which was given to Jesus to confirm what has been given in Torah and provide ‘Guidance and light’. Jesus has been portrayed in the Qur’an as ‘sign to all beings’, as a Word from God. His family was chosen above the worlds and he came in order that God might make him a sign to the people from Him.

Indeed, one finds a lot of approbation towards Christian issues. But the attitude of approbation does not suggest that disputes between these two religions are of minor nature, which could be explained away, with the help of some metaphysical formula. The single core argument might work within some explanatory framework but the hiatus between Christianity and Islam is too big to be easily bridged. Ninian Smart has very correctly raised this issue in his article “Truth and Religions”. His point of view is that there exists a lot incompatibility and divergence between these two faiths.⁷ The criterion for resolving divergences is another pivotal issue, which needs to be given proper attention. But this criterion should also take account of matters related to having *raison d’etre*. One must not forget the question of definite originality of the ideological phenomenon pertaining to the particular dynamism of different religious traditions. What we mean to say is that we cannot do away with divergent views and ideological incompatibilities, since they are necessary for the conceptual self-sufficiency of different religious frameworks.

Taking a lead from the above conceptual discussion on religious criteriology, one should not shun explaining what is incompatible and mutually contradictory between Christianity

and Islam. To develop a better perspective, first we need to look at what makes Islamic faith different from Jewish religion. Judaism, as we know, emphasizes a strict kind of monotheism. It denounces all kind of idolatry. No images or idols are allowed in Jewish temples. The belief in Unique and One God reigns supreme. Jewish people worship the God of Isaac, Jacob, and Moses with whom they think their forefathers made the covenant. But the problem with Judaism is that despite its commitment to the idea of one God, it is not a universal religion. It is essentially an ethnocentric tradition. Hebrew Bible portrays Yahweh as the tribal God — the God of Israel who does not think of the welfare of the people living beyond the boundaries of Judah and Samaria. Even Palestinian people living along with Jewish people are not shown worthy of his compassion and love. The Prophet Isaiah saw him enthroned in or above the Temple of Jerusalem, his robe filling the whole temple. Isaiah shows him jealously guarding and protecting his chosen people even at the cost of the slaughter of other surrounding nations. Jewish History has been declared as the sacred history on the basis of claim that God had continuously interacted, protected, and guided the destiny of Jewish people through a series of prophets, seers, and holy men. This is a picture of the parochial God, who cannot be called a universal God, whereas the logic of the concept of God demands universalism.

Islamic theology, in contrast, is founded on the outright rejection of the concept of a parochial God. It does not allow the ethnicity to play any kind or role in matters of faith and religion. The social interpretation of the monotheistic thesis, which Islam holds dear to its heart, lays stress on the belief in unity of mankind declaring the whole humanity as the family of God. For Islam, the whole human history is sacred as it displays the continuous role of God in deciding the destiny of all nations on the criteria of their trust in God and their level of commitment to truth, justice and piety. Thus, Islam follows the Abrahamic tradition of monotheism in its letter and spirit with clear emphasis on the idea of universal salvation. Salvation (*najah*) is freely available without the prejudice of cast, colour, and creed. The believer could be from any ethnic group or race. The only

consideration given importance is that the believer must believe in the Unity and uniqueness of God and follow the Qur'anic injunctions with obedience and sense of trust. Though the Hebrew monotheism clearly shows to have universal content, the notion of the chosen people takes away its universality. The belief in the covenant between God and Israel means, "One must be descended from the Jacob to be able to belong to God".⁸ This is the reason that Jewish religion could not emerge as a universal religion.

Christianity, on the other hand, preaches the idea of universal salvation. It does not allow a division in the name of Jews and Gentiles. It openly condemns ethnocentrism and rejects racial discrimination in religious matters. But in spite of this commonality of views on the universal character of religion, the gap between Christianity and Islam as the two disputing conceptual systems is too big for fallible humans to be bridged. The simple but unfortunate reaction shown on religious disputes is always that of censure and condemnation. For example, the controversialists like Father Zwemer would denounce Islam by declaring, "the Qur'an is an erroneous, heretical, if not inspired by the devil."⁹ Thus if from the viewpoint of the Christian extreme right Islam appears as a painful scandal, then there are some Muslim extremist like Ibn Taymiah who regard Christians as negators of the monotheist faith and thus hopeless polytheists. They condemn Christianity as a horrible case of aberration and deviation from the Abrahamic religious tradition.

The central faith-claims of the Christian religion, which Islam repudiates, are three: (1) The doctrine of Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, (2) The doctrine of Atonement for human sin by the death of Jesus on the Cross, and (3) The concept of God as Trinity. There is also a strong dispute on the issue of crucifixion. But this issue is not of much importance for the overall purview of the present discussion. For the present, we need to by pass it and concentrate on the three issues pinpointed above.

Muslim scholars generally believe that the idea of incarnation stands against the world-view of the Semites. Its

roots go deep into the Indo-Aryian Avataric theology, which revolves around the idea of God becoming incarnate in human form. The incarnate God like Krishna comes to the world in order to save humans from sin, darkness, and evil. Shankra Calls him the personal Lord. The devotion to this personal Lord is required in order to achieve liberation (mukti or moksa) from the wheel of endless ills or release from the world of sufferings. The idea of incarnation was introduced by the Greek fathers with the help of Greco-Roman cosmology which tells that the Absolute can enter this spacio-temporal world by taking up a human form to redeem this world from evil. A Christian theologian may give many arguments in favour of the logic which works behind the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, but he would not be able to convince a Muslim or for that matter a Jewish believer. Actually, these religions have their own parameters to understand the reality of God. Of course, one may argue that there is no logical barrier to God becoming incarnate in fully human form. But the counter argument is that in matters relating to a religious form of life the believer does not think whether there is a logical barrier or not. What matters in this type of issues is that whether the universe of discourse and internal grammar and structure of a particular religious tradition allows the use of a specific term. The term incarnation, as we know, is quite alien to the Semitic way of thinking. Such a word as having the meaning of incarnation is not available in Semitic languages, viz. Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic languages. Further, it is argued that the Semitic mind absolutely denies entertaining the idea of the entry of God into human form as a physically living being. This is why Judaism and Islam find the doctrine of incarnation abhorrent and horrifying.

The position the Qur'an has taken in many passages about the issue of identifying creature with the creator is crystal clear. Those who ascribe partner or associates to Allah are called '*Mushrikin*'. Christians are accused of being polytheists on account of holding that Jesus as the Son of God is an object of worship. For Islam, Jesus is a historical person, a great Prophet, a Messiah, a spirit of God, a sign of Allah on earth. He was elected from the womb of his mother to play his role of universalizing

the divine grace, but he was not a deified partner to God or a God in himself. The idea of deification of man, Muslims believe, is against the principle of *Tauhid*.

The Christian belief in Trinity is also incompatible with the Islamic creed. The straightforward reaction to this doctrine is that of absolute negation. It has been declared as an unforgivable '*shirk*'. According to the Qur'an: 'they say, God most gracious has begotten a son! Indeed you have put fore the thing most monstrous! At it skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, that they should invoke a son for (God) most gracious' (10:90). Christians, on account of holding the doctrine of the Trinity, have been declared as polytheist. Seventy-third verse of Surah *Al Ma'idah* says: 'they do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity' (5:73). Muslim scholars are of the view that the dogma of the Trinity is not part of the 'Ingil' entrusted by God to Jesus. Further they point out that the term 'Trinity' does not appear in the Gospel. The Pauline Christianity developed the concept of three equal partners in the Godhead at some later stage. The diverse references to God, Jesus, and the Spirit found in the New Testament were systematized into the doctrine of 'Trinity'. In this regard, the Christian fathers took the help of Greek philosophy and explained this doctrine in terms of Platonic Metaphysics, and Neo-Platonic emanationism. It is a widely held belief among Muslim scholars that "the early Church lost the original 'Gospel' and several leaders set themselves to making good the deficiency, with the result that they all differed and they all were wrong."¹⁰

Jesus, according to the Qur'an, was a prophet and messenger of God. He was a mortal human being like all other prophets. He taught nothing but the worship of God and devotion to what would meet God's approval. Islam emphasizes that God's worship must be exclusive and absolute. The man who believes in the doctrine of human redemption through Jesus is considered to be the enemy of God but also the enemy of Jesus.¹¹ It is imperative for a believer to shun all forms of associationism and

to recognize the validity of monotheistic forms of worship, which the pre-Christian Hebrew religious tradition also accepts.

The third doctrine refuted by Islam is the Christian doctrine of atonement, which asserts that the death of Jesus on the Cross is meant to atone for the sins of the mankind. This doctrine is based on the view that world had been corrupted by sin and evil and thus needed to be redeemed. Jesus through his crucifixion defeated the evil and delivered the humanity from the state of 'original sin'. The Muslim scholars reject this doctrine on the grounds that it violates the principle of Divine justice. What the divine justice demands is that every man should bear the responsibility of his deeds. No one should serve as the scapegoat for another. No one can atone for another's sin. The principle the Qur'an teaches is that 'every soul draws the mead of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burden can bear the burden of another (6:164). On the day of Judgement, each soul will be punished or rewarded for what it has done. 'Then shall every soul be paid what it has earned' (2:281). In order to forgive sinners, God requires sincere repentance. Only God is the saviour. Salvation and redemption only belong to Him. Even no one can intercede without God's permission and will (2:255). In this regard, Iqbal makes an incisive observation when he argues that man has been endowed with a unique individuality "which makes it impossible for one individual to bear the burden of another, and entitles him only to what is due to his own personal effort." This argument leads one to 'reject the idea of redemption' and atonement.¹²

Professor A. J. Ayer has subjected this doctrine of atonement to criticism on moral grounds. In his view, this doctrine is based on the belief that "God, in the person of his own son, turned himself temporarily into a man, and underwent torture and painful death in order to make it possible for sinful man to be redeemed from the punishment, which he would otherwise have inflicted."¹³ Ayer's assessment of this belief is that it is very hard to accept the idea of vicarious suffering. The notion of vindictive punishment cannot be justified on rational grounds. All norms of rationality and ethical value system are

against the claim that a person can be punished on account what others have done or going to do in future. Actually the foundation of this doctrine is rooted in the myth of the scapegoat. Ayer insists that even if the person himself elects to be sacrificed, his free choice for the self-sacrifice is morally reprehensible. The pertinent question he puts forward is:

“If God wished to absolve men from their sins, why could he not simply do so, without exacting any price from himself or any one else? Why indeed, if he was so deeply concerned with men’s behaviour, and had the power to make them as he chose, did he not endow them with a nature and a form of life which would ensure that they always behaved in a way of which he approved.”¹⁴

This way of criticizing the doctrine of atonement broadly vindicates the Islamic standpoint. The Islamic approach is based on the principle of simplicity in the Godhead. But since Christianity is a kind of mystery religion, one finds a lot of incomprehensibilities in its doctrinal system. The Christians doctors call them subtle paradoxes. But the problem with these paradoxes is that they not only defy the principle of simplicity but also deviate in a large way from the religious milieu from which it emerged in Palestine.

Regarding the doctrine of atonement, Islam holds that since a true prophet could not die a criminal’s death, Jesus should not be believed to have died on the Cross. Hence, it finds it necessary to deny the physical reality of crucifixion. This belief is grounded in the Rabbinic Jewish writings, which point out that the crucifixion is the death penalty awarded to robbers and bandits. Jesus was a holy prophet and a spirit of God. How could God with all his might, wisdom, and omnipotence permit his adversary to subject him to an ignominious death? God should have rescued Jesus from his enemies who were clearly working on the evil designs against the Kingdom of God. And surely God did this in his own way. He rescued him by substituting him with the traitor at the time of his arrest. The traitor amongst the disciples (possibly Judas Iscariot) was the substitute. He was

made to suffer because he committed the high treason. Further to this, it was necessary to smash the designs of those who were conspiring against God. The Qur'anic verse on this issue reads: "They killed him not nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to be. (*shubbiha la-hum*) ... God raised him unto Himself (4:157-8). Now Jesus lives in the presence of God waiting to return to defeat the force of evil and confirm the true faith of Islam.

One should not ignore the fact that Christianity and Islam are two competing religions, which operate within mutually contradictory conceptual frameworks. The conceptual differences between them range from the concept of God to the idea of Divine revelation — God's manifestation in history. These differences are further complicated by the literalist and exclusivist interpretation of the religious message. Each of them make claim to finality and truth. In order to claim that the religious tradition to which one belongs is absolutely true, it seems necessary to criticize, negate and reject other religions as false, heretical, and scandalous. This approach has generated a lot of disharmony, intolerance, antagonism, and hatred in the world. There are religious believers who hold that what they believe in is the only truth and what other people believe is the creation of darkness.

Father Samuel M. Zwemer was one of such critics of Islam. He was a well-educated theologian and missionary who devoted his life to preaching Christianity to Arab Muslims in Bahrain. His duty required of him that he should critically examine Islamic faith. He believed that the revelation of God in Jesus must be accepted without rational criticism and that using all instruments of reason and doubt one should reject the revelation of God through Muhammad. Giving a judgement on Islam he said: "This is the greatest of all false faiths."¹⁵ In the same vein he claimed: Mohammad's idea of God is out and out deistic.¹⁶ And his "idea of God is inadequate, incomplete, barren and grievously distorted."¹⁷ Mohammedanism is the worst form of monotheism in that it makes of God pure will — will divorced from reason and love."¹⁸

Zwemer published his *Moslem Doctrine of God* in 1905 when the most of the Muslim world was under the political domination of Christian Europe. Through ever expanding missionary activities Europe earnestly hoped that its rival religions in the oriental world would soon be vanquished like those in America and Australia. Missionaries were well convinced that with the victory of Western civilization Christianity would also defeat its competitors like Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. But, in spite of doing anti-Islamic propaganda in the shape of frantic religious activity, they failed to win the crusade. Zwemer shows the spirit of an intellectual crusader when he quite frankly wrote at the end of his book: "These two banners represent two armies. There is no peace between them. No parliament of religions can reconcile such fundamental and deep-rooted differences. We must conquer or be vanquished."¹⁹

Though the intention of writing the book was to engage in a comparative study of the Christian Muslim doctrines of God, Zwemer mainly adopted a negative attitude toward Islamic faith and creed. His aim was to tarnish the image of his rival religion so that he could more conveniently preach Christianity to the Muslim Arabs. When he had already made up his mind against Islam, how could we expect from Zwemer that he would give judgements on merit? He himself accepted during the debate that in his standard of judgement he was not fair. He made it clear when he said: "In the comparative study of religious ideas there must be a standard of judgement and a Christian can only judge other religions by the standard of the Gospel."²⁰

Before giving due consideration to Zwemer's claim, it needs to be emphasized first that his standard of judgement lacks the merits of rational, unprejudiced, and sympathetic criteria of judgement. Secondly, the objections he has raised after indulging in a long disputation are not only contentious but are also blatant examples of begging the question. Thirdly, a Muslim believer will be within his epistemic right if he retorts with reply: Why should I accept the criterion of Judgement, which is hostile to my religious tradition. Fourthly, Zwemer's judgements smack the

attitude of a person working under the illusion of holding the truth alone. Fifthly, pride, self-regard, and self-righteousness are central to his way of looking around the world he lives in. Since rationality demands that interfaith dialogue must continue, we need to take account of his criticism with all seriousness. His criticism revolves around the following objection:

- (1) Islam denies any possible filial relation on man's part toward Deity. No one can approach God except as a slave. Allah produces in man an abject, not a filial fear.

Zwemer finds himself justified contending that Islamic monotheism is responsible for much of the fanatic spirit and gigantic pride we find in the Muslim believers. The denial of God's Fatherhood is not only their denial of Brotherhood of Man, but is also denial of the living God. And this denial of God's fatherhood changes God into a barren abstraction.

- (2) According to Zwemer the important element the Islamic idea of God lacks is the element of love. Although the ideas concerning God's mercy, loving kindness, and goodness have been emphasized, these ideas only express the external aspect of God. In Christian Bible love is not merely an attribute of God, it is an essential part of his substance. In contrast, Zwemer alleges, Allah is too opulent and too proud and too independent to need or desire the tribute of love. Hence, Zwemer comes to conclusion: "Islam is a loveless creed."²¹
- (3) Zwemer further alleges that since Islam denies the doctrine of atonement and minimizes the heinousness of sin, it fails to strongly insist on the justice of God and often presents it in a weak or distorted way. Another defect Zwemer has pointed his finger at is that in Islamic theology mercy and truth do not meet together; righteousness and peace have never kissed each other.²²
- (4) Zwemer claims that Islamic monotheism does not demonstrate the harmony and equality in God's

attributes. This is the requirement, which a perfect theistic religion needs to fulfill.

On the basis of the above objections, Zwemer is of the view that Moslem doctrine of God is sterile and abject. It has neither grown nor been fruitful of new ideas in all the history of Islam.²³ Zwemer believes that it is impossible to acquire a genuine and scientific knowledge of God without the help of the doctrine of the Cross. Resultantly, Muslim monotheism has degenerated into either deism or pantheism which has paralyzed Islam's progress. And thus no spiritual salvation or material progress is available for the Muslim masses.

Another Christian writer J. Murray Mitchell, who was known as the prince of Missionaries, wrote a very boisterous and deriding chapter on Islam in his book entitled, "The Great Religions of India" by condemning Islam as one of the heathen creeds of India although he authored this book with the claim that "his object would be not to denounce but to describe; not to expose but expound."²⁴ But the web of arguments knitted in this book is a sheer example of regrettable self-contradiction on the part of a colonialist English Priest who believed that Britain's occupation of Indian Empire was due to a purpose – a purpose worthy of God. It is essential to note that Father Murray Mitchell was religiously intoxicated and Christ centric missionary. His outlook thus was narrow in approach and full of commitment to the paltry ideals and religious fanaticism. Not only does he distort the truth in the name of holy truth but also finds it necessary to justify the perpetration of British Raj in India. What he wrote for the holy cause is a clear example of spiritual exaggeration, and morbid inability to accept others' point of view. This is further confirmed by the following objectionable claim he has made about Muslim believers: "To expect Muhammadans will become truly civilized is to expect that they will cease to be Muhammadans."²⁵ His hatred for Islam becomes further clear when he predicts that Muhammadanism would soon loose its iron sway over its two hundred millions believers all over the world. He earnestly prays to the Lord that his prediction

about the disintegration of this heathen religion should come true.

However, about the Indian Muslims Mitchell was hopeful that though "the great body of Muhammadans in India remains the same hard, harsh, repellent mass as it has hitherto, his bitter prejudices, grounded in sheer ignorance, will gradually be mitigated or removed".²⁶ This wishful hope is based on two suppositions. First, the divine Providence will permit the British suzerainty still to endure. Second, the missions in India will exercise sympathy, patience, and kindness with the Muhammadan mind.

The exposition Zwemer and Mitchell have made of Islam not only simply defies one's good sense, but is also deficient in scholarship. Charity and objectivity are also lacking. What they profess is the characteristic of nineteenth century European prideful outlook that insists that it exclusively holds a key to the divine truth. As a politically dominant world religion Christianity was convinced that God has truly revealed himself only in the Christian Religion. Karl Barth for example has asserted in his *Church Dogmatics* that Jesus is the one and only revelation of God. Rejecting reason and rationality in his approach, he claimed that Christianity is a religion of the pure grace of God and this fact differentiates it from all other religions as the true religion.²⁷ Emill Brunner follows the same exclusivist line of argument and has come to the horrible conclusion that all non-Biblical religions are essentially eudaemonistic, and anthropomorphic.²⁸ What worked in the background of this attitude of condemning all other religions was pride and self-righteousness not the graceful and loving attitude of Jesus Christ. Jesus showed mercy and love even for his enemies during the whole period of his vocation as a Prophet and Messiah among the people who were full of evil, greed, and hatred.

No doubt nineteenth century brought to the Christian West conviction and hope — prosperity and progress. In this way, the Christians come to believe that what the Western Civilization had bestowed upon them is the net result of the expansion of Christian faith and values. The colonial dominance from

America to Australia made them believe that God was working in a special way to help them conquer the entire world. This is the perspective in which the importance of Mitchell's wishful prayer for the continuity of British suzerainty over Indian Empire can easily be understood. Now the question whether the fateful events that took place in the twentieth century corroborated and proved what these pious Christians prayed and predicted is not difficult to discern. In this continuity, a few words need to be added. Since, the whole game was based on greed and financial gains, their spiritual motives were deep rooted in envy, ill will and wish for destruction of other religious traditions. And the result was 'as you sow so shall you reap'. Jesus Christ says: "By their fruits ye shall know them." In the beginning of twentieth century, world war broke out and dreadful results of hypocrisy, hatred, and evil on the part of European Colonial masters appeared in the shape of large-scale death, destruction, dictators, and darkness. The pride of Western civilization shattered into pieces. The Christian fanaticism — spiritual as well as intellectual — had no answer to put forward, except to give some justifications here and there. In the Wittgensteinian parlance we could say that it did nothing but to flutter and flutter in the flyglass. Everything belonging to the ideas of hope, progress and conviction in the continuous growth of the institutions founded on the Western Civilization proved dismal failure. The Politico-religious map of the world drastically changed. Due to the two World Wars, the colonial structure of exploitation and plunder collapsed. The moral pretexts and social excuses failed to justify the continuing dominance on the wretched colonized people. The Christian West went through a trauma of continuous destruction and painful death in the European war-fields. Economies unable to support the expansive war machine fell deep into an incurable financial slump. Poverty, disease, and dread took over the Western nations. The Christian moral values failed to bail out humanity from the clutches of evil forces of darkness.

This was the situation, which gave birth to Existentialist philosophy. Existentialism rejected the absolute claims of reason and passionately embraced everything irrational. With the victory of Marxist ideology in the Eastern Europe and Soviet

Union, values belonging to Christian faith were relegated to redundant religious phenomena. Materialism reinforced the emphasis on accident and blind forces and thus explained everything else without any outside interference from a creator or divine being. The religion became superfluous in the world plan of the Marxist doctrine. Nietzsche had already told the European intelligentsia that to live a real life the hypothesis of God has to be dismissed. Religion is a neurosis, which makes use of its strength to tame and weaken the Superman. Nietzsche proclaimed: "Never yet has a religion contained a truth, either directly or indirectly, neither as a dogma nor as a symbol."²⁹ The Freudian psychoanalyst school declared that religious people have invented a father in heaven to replace the father they have experienced in the childhood. Their idealist comrades questioned the moral integrity of Christian believers in the following word: "Does not a humanist frequently behave more decently than a Christian? The answer is bound to be: of course."³⁰

In the face of this rejection and under the threat of total extinction from Communist ideology, the Christian West began to concentrate on the ideas of tolerance, coexistence, and religious pluralism. Christianity as a religious faith started showing a serious inclination to engage in a positive understanding of other religions. The Cold war era brought Christianity and other religious traditions closer to each other. Even the phenomena of social cooperation became visible.

In the philosophical domain, religious pluralism gained the ground in such a way as was unknown to the former centuries. Wittgenstein can be termed as the founding father of this doctrine. His 'Philosophical Investigations' has provided strong supporting grounds to the idea of religious Pluralism in the shape of his argument on multiplicity of language games and forms of life. His disciples and followers such as Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch and D. Z. Phillips applied his ideas to resolve conflicting religious world-views. John Hick also under his influence made it a mission to propagate pluralist thesis which is full of conflicting faith-claims. He has continuously defended his hypothesis that all religious traditions aim at relating oneself to

the Real in itself. It is like seeing the same reality in different ways. Contradictions are mostly due to cultural preconceptions. Hick claims: "the same divine reality has always been self-revealingly active towards mankind, and the differences of human response are related to different human circumstances."³¹

W. C. Smith, though in different manners, has pleaded for taking account of a wiser perspective on phenomena of religion in world history. He insists that one should "perceive oneself as in principle heir to the whole religious history of the race thus far". And also one should perceive "the community of which one is a member as in principle human community."³²

In this perspective, I shall claim that history and modern philosophical developments has rebuffed what Zwemer presented as a whole truth. His critique of Islam has proved not only as self-defeating but also superfluous and nonsensical. To use Wittgensteinian words, one may be within one's right to claim that Zwemer's criticism of Islam is a typical example of 'stupidity and dullness', which Wittgenstein calls the trademark of an English parson.³³

Zwemer's first objection is that there is no fatherhood of God in Islam. One may simply answer that the idea of the fatherhood of God is alien to Islamic creed. Rather it may be stated that the foundation of Islam has been laid on the negation of the idea of the fatherhood of God. How can Islam accept what is incompatible to its system of beliefs? Islam insists on the concept of God as a transcendent Real — the Real an sic who is ineffable and essentially unknowable. Ghazali says: "To bear relationship to what is imperfect carries with it imperfection ... God transcends relationship."³⁴ Islam is religion of strict monotheism, which insists that God is alone and unique in his perfection and comparable to none. In view of this, how can one expect from a reasonable person to pinpoint the lack of a certain feature in a picture, which is not a part of the picture under review?

Then he raises the objection that Muslim idea of God lacks the attribute of love. Actually, Zwemer is looking at the Islamic concept of God from the angle of the Christian religious

standard. We all know that the theology of love is an essential part of the Christian religious tradition. The idea of love is well knitted with the incarnational belief and the Trinitarian picture of the Ultimate Real. It is a Christian metaphor, which determines their personal orientation and temperament in understanding the world. But, in contrast, Muslims do not entertain any kind of such religious romanticism as is believed and practiced by the Christian people. In other words, Muslims do not live their lives in accordance with this metaphor. Its meaning and significance can only be understood within the Christian form of life. Attributes describing the reality of God in the Qur'an belong to a universe of discourse and framework of ideas quite different from that of Christian faith. The Qur'an repeatedly describes Allah as the compassionate, the merciful, the Lord of creation but not as a God concerned and involved in this world in some panentheistic formula of love and hate. Yes. Allah has been described as a Reality beyond any type of relation, yet he is not a deistic God. He is a God who is closer to the vein of human neck (50:12). In this way, the metaphor of love is significantly related to such ideas as primordial sin, redemption, incarnation, and atonement. But since these ideas have no place within the Islamic system of beliefs, the question whether the idea of Islamic God lacks the attribute of love or not is of no value whatsoever. Hence, this objection also stands rejected as a part of uncalled-for rhetoric against Islam.

Then we come across the blame that Islamic God is not absolutely, unchangeably and eternally just. Since Islam denies the doctrine of the atonement and minimizes the heinousness of sin, it is not surprising that it does not insist on the justice of God. If it has been emphasized, it has been done in a weak and distorted way. Though in Islam the connection between religion and Law (*shariah*) has been given a great importance, God's law is not the expression of His moral nature. These objections about the Islamic doctrine of the Justice of God are quite serious. But if we reflect deeply, we could come to the conclusion that these objections are based on the undue and excessive emphasis on the forensic aspect of God's holiness and righteousness. Further, it may be stated that in the formation of the Christian concept of

God, the idea of Platonic God who is absolutely good and the concept of Aristotelian God who is Unmoved Mover have played a major role. In this process, the Christian rationalist ignored the fact that the Semitic God is not the Greek God. The Semitic mind has always thought of him as all-powerful and all knowing without accepting any type of logical restriction on his omnipotence and omniscience. A Jewish believer, for example, would not accept the claim that the Judge of the world *must* do right always and everywhere. He knows it quite well that the Hebrew Bible does not support this tall claim. Why should God follow what human reason demands? Logical games are essentially incompatible with the idea of God. If a Christian theologian follows the idea of the Semitic God, he would find it impossible to accede to what Zwemer has argued about the absolute necessity for God to be just in dealing with the world he has created. This is a demand, which even the classical Christian theism would reject as something contradictory to the idea of God.

The fourth objection that there is a lack of harmony in Allah's attributes is also a part of the agenda to give a negative picture of Islam. This Objection can equally be raised regarding the package of attributes the classical Christian theism accepts about God. Actually the process theologians have already subjected Classical Christian theism to this objection. For them the package of attributes, which is essential to the classical theism, is not logically connected. It does not include the attributes of divine love. "Process theologians — Griffin and others — believe that properties like love, compassion, sympathy are logically incompatible with the eight core attributes."³⁵ From their point of view the question is: how the God of the Classical Christian theism is compatible with the caring and loving God of the Bible?

Zwemer alleges that Islam as a religion is defective as it acknowledges only two active principles in the Deity, His will and wisdom; while it leaves His goodness and greatness as inoperative. This secondary objection is also essentially confusing and mistaken. It is based on a sheer negative approach,

which justifies what belongs to us and condemns what belongs to others. How can a religious tradition explain the idea of God without combining his will and wisdom with his greatness and goodness? In other word, it is impossible to give a harmonized picture of God without giving a proper package of God's attributes. However, every religion has its own way of talking about God; every religious tradition as a conceptual structure has its own criteria of intelligibility, conceptual self-sufficiency, and coherence. Islam as a conceptual structure and form of life is different from Judaism and Christianity. Hence' if it argues about the reality of God in a different way and with a different combination of the divine attributes, it must not imply that it means committing some serious mistake or making some illogical move on the chess Board of world religions. Now since Islam is not an ethnic religion, it does not allow us to characterize God as a patriarchal Divine figure. In the same manner, since Islam rejects the idea of incarnation, it simply refuses to accept the doctrine of God-man. Since Islam is not a Hellenized religion, its concept of God is neither rationally schematized nor morally ordained. A Muslim believer will be within his epistemic right to ask as to why my idea of God should conform to the Greek idea of God. God of Islamic revelation is more than a static unchangeable Essence of Platonic Super-Form. The Islamic idea of God works within the framework of its own religious beliefs, practices, and rituals. Within this framework, Islamic God is a living God who is responsive to human needs and actions. He is personal God of ceaseless creative activity. He sustains the creative world process. He is active in human history and manifest in nature.³⁶ He must be seen in the light of his dynamic and changing actions and interpersonal relationships founded on prayers and services.

Concerning J. Murray Mitchell's claims, one may state that they are politically motivated and deep rooted in spiritual egotism. A true religion does not allow this kind of negative attitude. He is a clear example of human pride and self-regard. His views lack tolerance and sympathetic understanding required of a scholar. His views are those of a colonialist missionary who was on a mission to annihilate other religions traditions by all

means. The twentieth century not only proved his suppositions as self-defeating, but also falsified his arguments in support of British imperialism. Kenneth Cragg wrote in 1956: "... the attitude that regarded Western imperialism as a Divine providence has long since disappeared."³⁷ It should also be remembered that the later half of the twentieth century did everything to eliminate the vices of racial discrimination and intolerance. In theological circles, it was generally agreed that intolerant and extremist views in religious matters should be relegated to the background. Now it is quite easy to argue that if those Muslim fundamentalists were wrong who claimed that the Christian Churches are the places of idolatrous worship, those who speak of Islam as a heathen religion were also wrong. The enlightened Christian theologians now agree with the suggestion that all Semitic religions share the same vision of God and speak of the same Divine Reality. And in spite of cultural and ethnic variations, pray and worship the same one God.

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