

FOREWORD

Why add another book on the subject of Comparative Religion ? Is it any use setting Christianity in comparison with other religions ? Religion as an anthropological phenomenon is not accepted by the author of this book as the criterion of judgment. To one who conceives that a Word of God has been uttered in speech and act, whereby religion may become true worship and not a soul-destroying opiate, it may seem useless to embark on any comparative study such as we present here. Why compare light and darkness ?

Such objections we readily admit, but still persist in offering this thesis. We would point out in the first place that our title is "Islam and Christian Theology". In this we have used the word theology in its strictest sense as the Word of God, though from time to time in the course of this work it will be impossible to avoid using it in its secondary signification as systematic doctrine. Christianity has the human custody of the Word of God. Within itself the essential nature of that Word has been subjected to the profoundest and most fruitful scrutiny. It has had to exercise an interpretative function, and has done so under the ever-present guidance of the Spirit of Truth. But outside Christianity, if we exclude the Jews, who have not yet entered into the fullness of their own heritage, there is presented in Islam a counter-interpretation which is significant for Christian theology. This cannot be ignored by any one, much less by those who believe that God is speaking His Word in Christ to every follower of Islam. The Muslim thinks that the Christian holds many superstitions. He does not know how the Christian thinks the message of Islam affects the fundamental Word of God to man. If his point of view is presented in a serious way, and shown in parallel to the progress of the human exposition within the Christian fold, the Muslim may perchance find the final statement more intelligible to him and relevant to the needs of his heart and soul when it cries out for the Living God. It is in the hope that the evangel may become the power of God unto salvation to the Muslim that this book has been written.

The present position is, that in hardly a single book written by a Muslim have we seen a correct appreciation of the theological position of the Christian. The gravest philosophers attack as Christian doctrine beliefs which Christians themselves repudiate. Sometimes a Muslim writer will confess himself puzzled, and say, as an able Lucknow scholar said after revealing a complete misunderstanding of the Incarnation, "If Christians mean something different from what I have stated, let them put it before us in an intelligible manner, so that we may be able to form a correct judgment on it". This also points to the inadequacy of the statement of Christian doctrine in languages spoken

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by Muslims. We have been great writers of tracts, but where are the standard works on Christian doctrine ? Even in the translation of the Scripture into Arabic and Urdu, in spite of the general excellence of the work done, mistakes are to be found which must be a stumbling block and which could have been avoided with a deeper knowledge of Islamic theological usage not to speak of studied accuracy in the statement of Christian truth.

Moreover, we find that the Muslim is compelled to criticize what is in his hands, which is often of the crudest description, and that, on the other hand, the Christian concludes that Muslim dogmatics are so crude as to be almost negligible. " We know not what each other says." How then can we meet ? What common language can we use ? How shall we ensure that there is a reasonable probability of our being intelligible when we address a theological message to Islam ? An aged Muslim friend said to the writer, " Until the theologians of both religions come together and speak with a common tongue, we must always be estranged ". These are practical points which have spurred the writer to write. He seeks to be a link though probably as a link he will have to take the strain on both sides.

Throughout, there has been no attempt to cultivate that neutrality which some call " objectivity ", but the writer has tried to avoid cheap retorts and mere debating points. He feels that if people were to read this book without knowing that he believed in Christ it would be a tragedy. Muslims themselves are forthright in their confession of faith, and will honour one who makes his own confession, even when they do not agree with it. Thus it is hoped that there will be no suggestion in this book of the impartiality of one who has not made up his mind. On the other hand, the writer hopes he has been fair when he has had to state tenets in which he has no belief. Less would be ingratitude to many Muslims, from whom he has learned much. In most cases he has allowed the statements to stand in the words of those who subscribe to the beliefs.

A confession of the inadequacies of both writer and material presented is made with no false modesty. No one is more conscious than the author that a much better book could have been written. A better book would have had to be much longer and written by one better equipped in Oriental languages, in philosophy and in Christian theology. When theologians read what is written and feel that all the points have been gone into before *ad nauseam*, the plea of the author is that some things have been presented in a new context and some perhaps rescued from the dusty tomes of the study to turn to purpose in a living world which, maybe, the West has outgrown. Others may consider that liberal Islam has not been adequately represented. But liberal Islam has not yet evolved a system of doctrine other than a broad theism not differing much from any ethical monotheism of a Hellenic-Semitic

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complexion with a head-dress of modern rationalism. Others will perhaps object to the presentation of the scholasticism of Islam and Christianity in the second part. But for this the author flatly refuses to apologize. The scholastic statement of Muslim doctrine has so many features in common with the similar statement in Christianity, in form, method and vocabulary, that it would have been absurd to attempt a work of this description without a full treatment of the mediæval development of systematic dogmatic by the exponents of dialectic. An examination such as will be presented to the reader may result in the rejection of the scholasticism which Islam offers, and it may lead to a corresponding rejection of those similar scholastic developments in Christianity. On the other hand, the reader will remember that, however scholasticism has been scoffed at, it was a system which came to fruition on one side in Spinoza, the profound influence of whose philosophy has had repercussions in modern times, and on the other hand, in St. Thomas Aquinas, who is rightly regarded as a theological genius. It may be that from our enlightened modern standpoint we may be able to discern in scholasticism deviations from what is central in Christianity, due to the attractions of a powerful philosophy which then held the field, but the minds which could use the great pre-Christian thinkers, Plato and Aristotle, in the criticism and systematization of their thought must not be dismissed with an airy gesture as beneath our notice. Finally we may see in the parallel systematization of doctrine in the two religions, evidence of which will be provided in abundance, a vocabulary, a method and a body of ideas which will make the intelligibility of one system clearer to the other, and throw into relief those matters which are vital to the creed of the Christian Church.

Other criticism will be offered by Orientalists, and they will no doubt be justified. For instance, the transliteration of words is a necessary evil, and no system is without its faults. Certainly the system adopted in the *Encyclopædia of Islam* is uncouth for English readers. The author will be content if his transliterations have made the original plain. By way of excuse for some deficiencies and the impossibility of making references to standard works in some instances, the writer would inform the reader that most of the work embodied in the following pages has been done in India, which is not yet famous for its theological libraries. Only by making elaborate notes when on furlough in England has it been possible to proceed at all, and sometimes at a critical point it has been impossible to refer to a book which was needed. The author has had, therefore, to trust to the accuracy of his notes without sometimes being able to check these at the final writing. He has also had to prepare all the typescript and indexes, and as his typing is of the one-finger variety, something of the exasperation involved may be imagined. The international situation has

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added to the difficulties, the first manuscript lying at the bottom of the sea. The author therefore craves the reader's kind indulgence.

It should here be said that the three "parts" of this work will each form separate units of a trilogy, though the main title is retained in each case. The materials for the remaining parts are all ready for the final writing, and it is hoped that they will follow soon after the publication of this present volume. The thanks of the writer are due in the first place to the Methodist Missionary Society, which has supported him for many years in the Henry Martyn School of Islamics, and has always helped him in his special work, and to the Rev. Godfrey Phillips of the Department of Missions in the Selly Oak Colleges, and indeed to many members of the staffs of those Colleges and their patron, Dr. Ed. Cadbury for much encouragement and aid. I would also express warm thanks to Dr. Richard Bell, Reader in Arabic at Edinburgh University, for help much appreciated. My colleagues on the staff of the Henry Martyn School have shown me great practical sympathy by allowing me to concentrate latterly to a great extent on this one task. I am very grateful to them. The names of the writers to whom I am indebted is legion. Evidence of this will be gathered from the following pages. If I have inadvertently used any words of theirs without due acknowledgment I humbly apologize and would point out that it is a proof of the efficacy of their teaching that now I cannot separate it from my own thinking.

Lastly, it is hoped that this book, in spite of faults, may stimulate the assistance of theologians in the task of presenting the evangel to Islam. The one who looks within for an infallible logic wherewith to reply to Islam will look in vain. He will not find it here. "We believe and therefore speak." He whom God guides to the truth will hear and believe likewise. Moreover, if there is anything here which is not of Faith, may God amend it, that He Who is the Truth may be all in all. And to Him be the Glory now and for ever. Amen.

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