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BIBLE COLLEGE

FOUNDED IN 1900

Mr. Gessler,

A-

You have given an excellent treatment of a very important comparative religious topic. Your outline is well organized, and your ideas well presented. I feel that the first half or two thirds of your "The Christian Critique" is excellent. The theological position is over stated, for if the Islamic position is truly impotent, how account for its historical and even somewhat current power? *power is in fanaticism not mentalism!* also, the Missionary Contact should I feel give more point to the practical, i.e., the personal, element. Most Muslims that are won to Christ are not thru logic, etc., but thru a spirit-filled life.

There is a diff. between Galatians and personal Evangelism.

H

MUSLIM MONOTHEISM

by

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Intersession

Wheaton College

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OUTLINE

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 - Their crusade for deity
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The Muslim Creed

The Unity of God Strongly Stated

Their Confession of Deity.--"The whole system of Mohammedan theology and philosophy is summed up in seven words: la ilaha illa Allah, Mohammed rasul Allah. There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is Allah's apostle".¹ It is a rigid monotheism throughout with a unswerving allegiance to the one supreme and solitary being, Allah. This is one of the shortest creedal statements in the world of religions, and yet its importance is not to be underestimated.

It is the motto-text of the Moslem's home life, the baptismal formula to welcome the infant as a believer, the final message to whisper in the ears of the dying....The words they chant when carrying a burden or bier; these words they inscribe on their banners and their door-posts; they appear on all the early coins of the Caliphs and have been the great battle cry of Islam for 13 centuries.²

The recitation of these words is extremely important to the Muslim. By such the infidel is turned to Allah, the renegade is turned back to God, and the idols of the heathen are crushed. These seven words express in their Islamic fervor the most militant monotheism of mankind. By them the faithful are called to prayer five times a day and upon them the varying

¹Zwemer, Samuel. The Muslim Doctrine of God, p. 8.

²op. cit., p. 17

sects of Islam unite in unreserved confession.

Their Conception of Deity.--The Koran never wearies of reiterating the formula of God's unity. In the sacred words of the 112th Surah (or chapter)

say: He is Allah, the one!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
He begetteth not nor was begotten
and there is none comparable unto Him.¹

This surah has been called "the essence of the Koran" and some Moslems considered it to be equal in value to one third of the whole book".²

There are many other attributes of Allah most of which are described in the traditional 99 names for God. Of these seven depict God's unity, five His creatorship, twenty four His mercy, thirty six His absolute sovereignty, five His avenging and four His moral characteristics. Even in these it is not difficult to detect the sense of oneness, solidarity and transcendence in this supreme monarch of the Muslims.

The defense of God's unity is attempted in a four-fold fashion:

1) From creation it is argued that there must be only one creator.

The originator of the heavens and the earth!
...He created all things and is aware of all things.
Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no God, save Him,
the creator of all things, so worship Him.³

And again it is said:

¹Pickthall, M. M. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, p.454.

²Zwemer, op. cit., p. 48,49.

³Surah 6:102,103.

Is not He (best) who created the heavens and the earth, and sendeth down for you water from the sky....Is there any God beside Allah? Nay, but they are folk who ascribe equals (unto Him)!¹

2) From reason it is argued that polytheism is groundless and fruitless for "He who crieth unto any other god along with Allah hath no proof thereof".²

3) From the nature of dualism it is argued that the universe would be disorderly or chaotic. "If there were therein Gods beside Allah, then verily both (the heavens and the earth) had been disordered".³

4) And finally from the former prophets⁴ it is argued that monotheism was the true religion from the beginning.

Allah is the creator of all things, and He is the Guardian over all things....and verily it hath been revealed unto thee as unto those before thee (saying): if thou ascribe a partner to Allah thy work will and thou indeed wilt be among the losers.⁵

So the unity and supremacy of God is both strongly stated and vigorously defended. It is idolatry to ascribe any partners or associates to deity whatsoever. For these reasons the use of imagery is virtually nil among Muslims as well as the use of any picture of Mohammed. In fact, this is why a Muslim detests being called a "Mohammedian". Say they:

A Christian is a man who believes that Christ was a part of God....a Mohammedian by analogy, would

¹Surah 27:60

²Surah 23:117

³Surah 21:22

⁴Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

⁵Surah 39:63,65

have to believe that Mohammed was likewise a part of God....But Mohammed was a man. He married, had children, earned a living, died and was buried in a grave like the rest of us. No learned man would worship Mohammed. It is God we worship. Therefore, call₁ us Muslims--those who submit to the will of God.

So said a Muslim dessert philosopher and so contends Islam in general.

Their Crusade for this Deity.--It is this one great truth which provides the moral fiber and spiritual tenacity of Islam. As Samuel Zwemer has put it, "The strength of Islam is not in its ritual nor in its ethics, but in its tremendous and fanatical grasp on the one great truth--monotheism".² And we may add that it was the conviction of this truth and its concomitants that has motivated Islam to move swiftly, and at times almost fanatically, in the power of the sword into most of the world and to convert more people than all of protestant Christendom together constitute.

The Trinity of God Strongly Hated

AS James Freeman Clarke has pointed out, the significance of a religion is often seen better in what it denies than in what it affirms.³ This is vividly illustrated by the Muslim aversion to the Christian trinity which doctrine is both explicitly denounced and implicitly denied in the Koran and Muslim tradition.

¹Readers Digest, "Islam: The Misunderstood Religion", May 1955, p. 70.

²Zwemer, op. cit., p. 7.

³Clarke, James. Ten Great Religions, Vol. II, p. 62.

Trinity Directly Denounced.--There is an animated anathama in the 4th surah which reads:

O prophet of the scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter ought concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three"--cease! (it is) better for you! Allah is only one God. For it is removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth!¹

The next reference to the trinity in the Koran is just as unequivocal when it states:

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah, for him Allah hath forbidden paradise. His abode is the Fire...They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save one God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve.²

The third and last reference, and the one most often used as a proof text against Christianity, is in this same surah:

And when Allah saith: O Jesus son of Mary! Dids't thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? he saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that of which I had no right.³

From these quotes it is hardly possible to conceive of one being both a Christian and a Muslim without having a form of religious schizophrenia. On the doctrine of God the two

¹Surah 4:171

²Surah 5:72,73

³Surah 5:116

religions are antithetical. For the Muslim, God is not three nor even three in one, He is one and no more.

Trinity Indirectly Denied.--The Christian doctrine is tritheism to Islam but any form of polytheism is likewise taboo. So in numerous passages we have the implicit denial of the trinity with the explicit attacks upon idolatry. According to the teaching of the Wahabi sect, there is a four-fold way one may become an idolater: 1) By ascribing knowledge to another beside God; 2) By ascribing the power to-act-independently to any but God; 3) By ascribing partners to God who can be worshipped, or 4) By performing ceremonies which would indicate reliance on anything save God.¹ This process is called shirk, the ascribing companions or plurality to deity, and it is expressly prohibited by all Muslim sects.

What do they do with the other two members of the Christian trinity? The answer is quite simple. One is modified and the other^{is} angelic. Jesus is only a prophet, a man. Virgin born, sinless, and exalted to heaven but only a slave of Allah not a son.² The Holy Spirit mentioned several times in the Koran is unanimously understood to refer to the angel Gabriel who brought the original revelation to Mohammed.³

So then both tritheism or polytheism of any kind--of which the Christian trinity is considered a part--is expressly condemned by the Koran and all faithful Muslims.

¹Zwemer, op. cit., p. 82.

²See Surah 3:37-43; 19:16-21; 3:51; 9:30

³Zwemer, op. cit., p. 88.

The Christian Critique

It is exactly at this point that the cross and the crescent are to clash most markedly. For the trinity is the heart of Christianity. Without the triune God (at least the deity and saviorhood of Christ) there is no essential Christianity. So, from the Christian vantage point, Muslim monotheism is decidedly lacking. First of all, it is---

Morally Inferior

Allah is not only sub-moral to the Christian trinity but even to the Elohim or Jehovah of Judaism. For both have a God who is Father, essential love and unchangable just none of which are characteristics of Allah.¹ A god who is not father bars any relationship of man to himself. One may have only servile fear but not filial love. And furthermore, "where there is no fatherhood there can be no brotherhood of man. Islam is an exclusive brotherhood of believers, not an inclusive brotherhood of humanity".²

Likewise there is a conspicuous lack of essential love in Allah. Some of His attributes indicate that He has an external relation of mercy and compassion but in no sense does He compare to the Christian God who is love in Himself essentially and fundamentally.³

And finally, Allah is depicted as an arbitrary, capricious

¹See Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 31:3

²Zwemer, op. cit., p. 110.

³I John 4:16

sovereign who does what He wills and that alone. Justice is not grounded in the unchanging nature of a good God but in the unpredictable volition of an absolute sovereign. Omar Khayyam, the famous Muslim poet, has stated it this way:

Tis all a chequer-board of nights and days
Where destiny with men for pieces plays;
Hither and thither moves and mates and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.

See also Search
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3:26

Such is not the God the apostle Paul described when he wrote, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right".¹ But not only is Muslim monotheism morally inferior to Christian trinitarianism but it is---

Philosophically Insufficient

The famous Hegel wrote:

If we regard God merely as the absolute Being and nothing more, we know Him only as the general irresistible force, or, in other words, as the Lord. In the Mohammedian religion God is conceived only as Lord. Now although this conception of God is an important and necessary step in the development of religious consciousness, it yet by no means exhausts the depth of the Christian idea of God.²

This is to say that monotheism itself though fundamental is incomplete. It tends to develop either into a deism at the hand of the transcendentalists or a pantheism at the hand of the mystics. As Dr. Zwemer has put it: "Mohammed teaches a God above us; Moses teaches a God above us and yet with us; Jesus Christ teaches God above us and with us and God in us".³

¹Romans

²Hegel's Werke, Vol. VI, p. 226.

³Zwemer, op. cit., p. 76.

Also in this is a clue as to why the Muslim God is neither depicted as Father nor love. Both concepts have trinitarian implications. If God is essentially and eternally love then there must be a plurality in His unity. For as Augustine pointed out before Mohammed was born, Love is itself a trinity¹ including a Lover, a beloved, and a spirit of love. The same applies on a dual level to the concept of an eternal Father which necessitates the idea of an eternal Son. If God was always a Father, then He always had a Son.

In our opinion, the only alternative to a plurality in a theistic unity is a monotheistic monotony. If God is one solitary person, then He must have been plagued with His own monotony in the beginningless period of eternity past before He created anything with whom He could fellowship or to whom He could communicate. But furthermore, to the Christian, Islamic monotheism is---

Theologically Incomplete

For it was "in the fulness of the time that God sent forth His son". (Galatians 4:4) There was a purpose in revealing Himself first as a unity and then in His plurality. There is progress in the Christian revelation which is as a great orchestra reaching a crescendo in the person of Christ. The "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son". (Hebrews 1:1,2)

From the early days of Old Testament times God deemed it necessary to reveal His unity in view of the polytheistic back-

¹Augustine, De Trinitate, p.

ground of the patriarchs and their neighbors. Later, through Christ and the descention of the Holy Spirit, this unity of essence was unfolded to reveal a plurality of persons in the one God. As Alexander Maclaren has put it:

Historically, a pure theism is all but impotent.... The God whom men know outside of Jesus Christ is a poor nebulous thing; an idea and not a reality. You will have to get something more substantial than a far-off god of an unchristian, theism if you want to sway the world and satisfy men's hearts.¹

Anything short of this is theologically incomplete and, we might add, anything beyond this is Scripturally unwarranted.

The Missionary Contact

But with all of this we are still left with the problem of conveying the message of the Christian trinity and particularly of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ to the militantly monotheistic Muslim. How is this to be done? We would suggest the following procedure with two grave handicaps. We have never been a missionary to Muslims, and this is a paper procedure, not an existential experience. Therefore our suggestions have more of a logical than psychological order.

The Basic Contact

First of all, we suggest that the basic contact should be made with their concepts of monotheism and revelation. It seems both unnecessary and useless to argue whether Allah is the same God as Elōhim, Jehovah or Θεός and Kyrios . There is only one

¹Zwemer, op, cit., p. 14.

God as we must conclude from both revelation and reason.¹ From this view point, their monotheism is both commendable and useful.

The Bilateral Comparison

However, we must not stop here, but make the bilateral comparison of the essentials of both religions. As a claimant to revelation, the Koran should be compared to the Bible. As the prophet of God Mohammed should be contrasted with Christ and as satisfying experience, the Muslim life to the Christian life.² Of course none of this is to be done in the spirit of superiority nor in a polemical fashion, but humbly and prayerfully.

The Biblical Completion

To this witness would be to point up the distinctiveness of the Christian revelation to the Islamic. Allah is only fully understood in the triune Θεός, the New Testament contains the gospel of which the Koran spoke and the Muslims cannot produce, and Christ is the fulfillment of Torah's prediction (Mt. 5:17), the mediator of man's salvation (I Tim. 2:5), and the revelation of God's nature (Heb. 1:2; Jn. 20:28). This is to say that all the good to be found in Islam is more fully expounded and more perfectly revealed in the Christian Scriptures. And the seeds of Muslim monotheism come to full blossom in Christian trinitarianism.

This is but a skeleton of the logical and spiritual

¹See Deut. 6:4; Rom. 1:19,20

²Dr. Zwemer has done this admirably in The Cross Above the Crescent.

superiority of Christianity to Islam. Much more needs to be said, but at least this much must be both brought to the attention of their minds¹ and lived to the conviction of their hearts that they may see Christ in us² and in Christ see the Father so that, as doubting Thomas of old, they may fall at His feet and cry out "My Lord and my God" (John 14:9).

¹The practical approach alone is not sufficient. For support of this see "The Theological Approach", Muslim World, January 1939.

²J. Christy Wilson notes that Christianity has gained very few converts from Islam. However, it has "had an enormous general effect in Muslem lands and should continue to serve these peoples in the spirit of Christ even though there were not a single convert". Muslim World Vol. XXXIV, 1944, p. 122.



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