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Editorial

This is the first edition of South Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy (SAJRP). The editors have brought together articles that discuss issues of religion and philosophy in the light of several other disciplines.

In the opening article, John Dupuche analyzes an Indic text (*Amṛtakunḍa*), which has influenced both the Muslim and the Christian mystical traditions. The author traces the origins of this text back to the heartland of the tantric tradition, thereby arguing that the Muslim tradition is open to new ideas from other religious traditions.

A recurring topic in debates by both Muslims and Christians has been the concept of personhood: what it means to be human and the nature of the relationship between the individual person and God. In the second article, Peter Riddell discusses the nature of person within Islam. He considers approaches taken by Muslim scholars, who were inclined to literal interpretations of the Qur'an as well as those inclined to reason-based interpretations of Islam's sacred text.

Some scholars are of the view that monotheism was not necessarily a Hebrew-Jewish construct but could also have been part of the Indo-Persian religious background associated with the Persian prophet Zarathustra. In the third article, Shanthikumar Hettiarchchi describes the belief held in the Persian context, which seems to have inspired and impacted on the subsequent Semitic traditions with a renewed theological vigor and an embrace of monotheism.

Scholars of comparative religion adopted the scientific method during the 19th and 20th centuries. However, they became disenchanted with this method in more recent decades. In the fourth article, Herman Roborgh argues that scholars of religion remain critical of their presuppositions and subjective biases. He further suggests that the study of religion could abandon the exclusivist approach to other traditions so as to foster a deeper engagement among them.

In her article, Bom Hyon Sunim makes a case for 'Engaged Buddhism' from within the Zen tradition. This is an important contribution for South Asian readers as they are more exposed to the Theravada understanding of the nature of reality. The relevance of Buddhist thought to social engagement is argued succinctly as a moral imperative for human progress.

This edition of the Journal also contains several reviews of books related to religion and philosophy. We are grateful to the reviewers of these books and invite the scholars and academics of South Asia and further afield to make their own academic contribution to the Journal. The launch of this maiden issue of SAJRP has coincided with the international conference at Minhaj University Lahore on the historically debated theme of Science, Reason and Religion, which has of interest to hundreds of scholars throughout the world especially during recent centuries.

Vision

Respectful and critical discussion of issues related to religion and philosophy will lead to a deeper appreciation and understanding of different religions in the world and promote peace among people.

Mission

To provide a forum for discussion of critical issues related to religion and philosophy with a special focus on South Asia.

Aims and Objectives

To encourage a profound and more regular exchange of ideas on the subject of religion and philosophy, particularly on South Asia to publish original articles, selected through a peer review process on a bi-annual basis.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in SAJRP reflect the views of the author only. They do not reflect the views of the Institute or the Journal. Responsibility for the accuracy of facts, data and for the opinion expressed rests solely with the authors.

INTRODUCTION

South-Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy is an effort by Minhaj University Lahore (Pakistan) to engage with South Asian academia as well as with the counter parts in the rest of the world on the subjects of religion and philosophy, which have had an intimate relationship with each other from time immemorial. For this reason, the journal provides wide parameters for its field of interest such as the history of religious thought and the philosophical traditions of East and West and their relationship with various other aspects of human life such as the development of culture and religious reform movements.

Other topics of interest for this new journal are the ways in which religion is connected with social movements, political developments, spiritual resurgence and scientific discoveries and, more recently, information technology. Most of these issues are not confined to any single period in history or to any one religion or philosophy, which have cross-fertilized every form of ancient and modern knowledge and practice. Religious traditions and philosophical principles should also reflect about global trade and commerce because of the latter's huge impact on modern life. Furthermore, religion and philosophy provide checks and balances for a variety of new developments being initiated by faith-based movements throughout the world.

This Journal hopes to encourage committed researchers and scholars of religion and philosophy to contribute articles based on original scholarship that will throw light on any of the above issues. The editorial board will ensure that sufficient attention is given to both conventional and non-conventional approaches to the study of religion and philosophy.

The Journal will also encourage younger scholars to make a contribution by discovering how religion and philosophy are linked with issues of social justice, democracy, identity politics, cross cultural competency, the environment, human rights, interfaith dialogue, spirituality, social-responsibility and the challenges of fundamentalism, radicalization, violence and extremism.

South-Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy is an international peer-reviewed academic journal issued twice a year, once as a regular journal and once with a focus on a special theme. The Journal is published on behalf of the 'School of Religion and Philosophy' at Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan. This new 'School' is a growing

centre of study and research on religion and philosophy at Minhaj University and yearly hosts Pakistan's largest international academic conference on religion and philosophy.

My best wishes to the eminent editorial board of the Journal that has produced this maiden volume. I also appreciate the cooperation shown by the foreign board of editors as well as the local board of editors whose support and advice are of inestimable value.

Hussain Mohi-Ud-Din Qadri
Deputy Chairman of the Board of Governors
Minhaj University Lahore

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TANTRI ASPECTS OF *HAWDMĀ' AL-HAYĀT*
("The Pool of the Water of life"):
An Arabic Text Developed from Hindu Sources

John Dupuche

ABSTRACT

The *Amṛtakunḍa* is the Muslim reworking of an Indic text, which traces its origins back to the heartland of the tantric tradition. It has, remarkably, influenced both the Muslim and the Christian mystical traditions. This article seeks to discern its tantric elements, in particular those of the Kula tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. In doing so, it makes the point that the Muslim tradition has customarily been open to new ideas. The article studies the pre-text and the context of the *Amṛtakunḍa*. It then analyses its ten chapters, showing how it draws on *haṭh yoga* and increasingly on tantric sources, among a vast range of other sources, religious and philosophical. As its title suggests, the aim is to find the 'waters of life', proposing practices which can release these waters and lead the practitioner to the blessed state of the prophets and saints.

Key words: *Amṛ takuṇ ḍa*, Islam, Sufism, Tantra, Kashmir Shaivism, *Haṭ ha yoga*

INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION

It is rare to find an ancient work that has influenced both the Muslim and Christian worlds. The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, an Indic text, has done just. Caterina Greppi has studied its impact on Christian Hesychasm.¹ Regarding its place in the Muslim world, C. W. Ernst states, "the different translations of The Pool of Nectar are unanimous in affirming that [it] is the most famous and respected scripture of India [in Islamic circles]." ²

¹. Caterina Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta, Analisi di un anticotesto Indiano: L'Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*. (Torino: Il Leone Verde, 2011).

². Carl W. Ernst, "The Islamization of Yoga in the *Amṛtakunda* Translations," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 13 (2003): 206.

Why is it famous and respected? What impact did it have? How does it counter the prejudices of our day? For there are indeed prejudices C.W. Ernst puts it thus: “The standard minimalist concept of Islam current in the mass media today identifies it with authoritarianism, legalism, and violent iconoclasm.”³ The *Hawdmā’ al-hayat* shows that this caricature does not represent the norm. Indeed, the middle periods of Islamic history created vast ecumenical structures, in which minorities had freedom of expression.⁴

The acceptance of “inevitable cross-influences”⁵ contrasts with a long-standing approach that affected attitudes in Europe and its eventual colonies, an approach that came to the fore during the Protestant Reformation where ‘religion’ was deemed to involve a corpus of doctrine unaffected by history. Any importation of foreign practices or ideas was a ‘borrowing’ and a weakening of the essence.⁶ This attitude could also be found Muslim circles, despite the fact that multiple ideas and practices had long been at work in the lives of the many who deemed themselves to be faithful to their tradition.⁷

Even though the typical situation in Muslim history is diversity and debate, this does not mean that the different schools of thought accepted each other as equals. On the contrary, each school considered itself to be the correct orthodoxy, each with its proofs of validity. In Islam, as in other religious traditions, there was a pluriform and not a uniform culture.⁸ It is more accurate to speak of a polythetic classification in Islam where a large number of topics have a wide range of meanings and are not reduced to one simple formula.⁹

³. Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga,” 223.

⁴. Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga,” 223.

⁵. Mostafa Vaziri, *Rumi and Shams’ Silent Rebellion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 183.

⁶. Carl W. Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 15 (2005): 15.

⁷. Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” 21.

⁸. Dominique-Sila Khan, *Crossing the Threshold, Understanding Religious Identities in South Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 26.

⁹. Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7.

The question arises: can Hindu tantric aspects be found in the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*? To answer the question, we will outline the context in which the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* arises. We will then examine the ten chapters of the text, firstly giving a short presentation of the contents of the chapter and then secondly noting its tantric aspects.

PART 1: THE CONTEXT

This article uses makes use of Greppi's Italian translation¹⁰ of Yusuf Husain's edition.¹¹ The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* has a long and complex history whose eight stages are putatively set out by Carl W. Ernst¹² in 32 (or 84) verses of *Kamakhyā*, a Sanskrit text on divination and magic.

The main temple of the tantric goddess *Kāmākhyā* is located at *Kāmarūpa* in Assam. Her name signifies 'she who is called *kāma*'. The Sanskrit term *kāma* refers to enjoyment, including sexual pleasure. *Kāmarūpa* means 'the form of *kāma*'. The tantric element is already present in the names.

This was developed into text with the title *Kamrubijaksa* (The *Kāmarūpa* Seed Syllables). A *haṭ ha yoga* treatise was composed in Sanskrit or Hindi with the title *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*. The *Kamrubijaksa* was translated into Persian.

Both the *Kamrubijaksa* and the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* were combined into one text, under the title *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, adapted and translated into Persian by Muhammad Gwaliari with the title *Bahr al-Hayat* ("Ocean of Life")¹³ and then in about 1212 C.E. into Arabic with the title *Hawdmā' al-hayat* ("The Pool of the Water of Life") in Bengal.

This was not unusual, for there had long been an interest in Indic texts. As early as the 8th century, Indian works were being translated in Baghdad, and in the tenth century the *Kitāb al-Fihrist* devotes an entire chapter to the

¹⁰. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, in Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta*, 143–194.

¹¹. Yusuf Husain, "Ḥauḍ al hayāt. La version arabe de l'Amratkund," *Journal Asiatique* CCXIII (1928): 291-344. He reconstructs his edition from five manuscripts in Paris and Leiden. So far, some 88 manuscripts have become available in libraries in Europe and the Middle East.

¹². Ernst, "The Islamization of Yoga," 206

¹³. Husain, "Ḥauḍ al hayāt," 294.

religions of India.¹⁴ When the Muslims entered north India in the 13th century they set about translating the major works of the Hindu tradition into Persian and Arabic in order better to understand and govern the people they had conquered.¹⁵ The Muslim penetration into Kashmir took place in the 14th century.¹⁶

A second Arabic recession was made. It consisted of a revision with additions from the Acts of Thomas (3rd cent.), the Treatises of the Brethren of Purity (composed in Basra 10th cent.) and Treatise on the Reality of Love, (Aleppo, 1191). This later recession is the subject of this article. There were a third and fourth Arabic recessions.

Further additions were made from various sources – the Qur’an, Hadith, Islamic law, theology and cosmology, as well as pious phrases and Sufi terms – which means that more than one third of Arabic version of the *Amr takuṇ ḍ a* consists of addition.¹⁷ There are also elements from Aristotelian philosophy and the writing of Ibn Sīna, such as the doctrine of the four humours (*Amr takuṇ ḍ a ch. VI*), the five elements (II, VI), the four qualities (VI, X) of the ‘rational soul’ (IV, V, VI), the universal intellect (I).¹⁸ C. W. Ernst lists further Persian, Turkish and Urdu translations. He notes that a Judeo-Arabic version has recently been discovered in Yemen.¹⁹

PART 2: THE TEXT

Considerations

Husain’s edition starts with some ten considerations taken from the *Hadith*, making the basic point that he who knows himself knows God. These need not detain us.

¹⁴ Flavio Poli, *Yoga ed Esicasmò* (Bologna: Editrice Missionaria Italiana, 1981), 169.

¹⁵ Husain, “Ḥ auḍ al hayāt,” 291.

¹⁶ Alexis Sanderson, “The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir,” in *Melanges tantriques à la mémoire d’Hélène Brunner*, ed. Dominic Goodall and André Padoux (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2007), 431.

¹⁷ Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga,” 209-210.

¹⁸ Greppi, *L’origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta*, 142.

¹⁹ Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga,” 202.

INTRODUCTION

The first Arabic translation of *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* adds a fictitious introduction, which mentions the town Kābr, which probably refers to *Kāmarūpa*.²⁰ It goes on to speak of a debate between Bhūgar, *abrahmin* and *yogin*, and the learned *īmām*, Qadi Rukn al-Dīn Samarqandī who lived during the reign of Sultān Alī Mardanī (1207-1212).²¹ Bhūgar is defeated and converts to Islam. He then shows the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* to the *īmām* who admires it and practices it and translates it into Persian and then into Arabic.

The second Arabic version has an equally fictitious but very different introduction. The writer says that when he found this book he was impressed by its “wonderful content” but could find no one to explain it till he discovered, in *Kābr*, a *yogin* called Ambhūabanah, a convert to Islam.

These introductions seek to assure the Muslim readership that the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* is orthodox, and at the same time show its Indic origins, and name its source as *Kābr* (*Kāmarūpa*) – the one name mentioned in both introductions.

A NOTE ON TANTRA

Kāmarūpa was the chief seat of a new branch of the *Kaula*, school founded by Matsyendranātha,²² who is also held to be at the origins of *haṭ ha-yoga*. By establishing the *Kaula* School, Matsyendra shifted the emphasis away from the shocking *Kula* practices that made use of cremation grounds to the *Kaula* practices that were acceptable in the home.²³ This shift was taken to even higher levels of abstraction in Kashmiri Shaivism whose greatest author, Abhinavagupta (c. 975-1025 CE), pays tribute to Matsyendra as the mythical founder of the *Kula* tradition. Jayaratha (c. 1225-1275 CE), the learned commentator of Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*, notes in his comments on *Tantrāloka*^{1.7} that Matsyendra, aka Minanatha, founded the school in

²⁰. Greppi, *L'origine del metodopsicofisicoesicasta*, 128.

²¹. Husain, “Ḥauḍ al hayāt,” 292.

²². *Kaulajñāna-nirnaya of the School of Matsyendranatha*, ed. P. C. Bagchi, trans. Michael Magee (Varanasi: PrachyaPrakashan, 1968), 41.

²³. The terms *kula* and *kaula* are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the *Kula* and *Kaula* traditions are porous.

Kāmarūpa.²⁴ There are many forms of *tantra*. This article focuses on the Kula tantric tradition of Kashmir Shaivism.

The influence of *tantra* on Muslim thinkers, noted in the ‘introductions’, was not unusual. The Nizārī branch of Isma‘ilism, a form of Shi‘a Islam that appeared in India in the eighth century²⁵ was deeply influenced by tantric forms of yoga and by the literature and ritual of the disciples of Gorakhnāth, himself a disciple of Matsyendranātha.²⁶ Satpanth, the syncretic form of Isma‘ilism that arises from this meeting, did not cease to be Muslim but was considered to be a ‘super-yoga’ encompassing and complementing the traditional *tantra*.²⁷ Muhammad al-Misrī, a Sufi of the Ilhāmiya school, in his exposition of the principles of Sufism esteems the *Amr takuṇ ḍ a* as a significant book for the study of Hindu yogic techniques that became an integral part of Sufism in India.²⁸ These few comments concerning the influence of *tantra* on Islam must suffice in this short article.

The text of *Amr takuṇ ḍ a* is divided into ten chapters, which become increasingly ‘tantric’ and significant for our discussion.

Chapter 1

This chapter describes the macrocosm / microcosm relationship which is basic to the whole text.

“The human being is a microcosm; everything that exists in the macrocosm in its entirety exists also in a reduced form in the [human] microcosm. The Sun and the Moon in the microcosm are the nostrils: that on the right has the function of the Sun and that on the left the function of the Moon.”²⁹

²⁴. Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka, with the Commentary of Jayaratha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 24.

²⁵. Dominique-Sila Khan, “Conversation between Guru Hasan Kabīruddīn and JogīKāniphā: Tantra Revisited by the Isma‘ili Preachers,” in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 284.

²⁶. Khan, “Conversation between Guru Hasan Kabīruddīn and JogīKāniphā,” 286.

²⁷. Khan, “Conversation between Guru Hasan Kabīruddīn and JogīKāniphā,” 290.

²⁸. Husain, “*Ḥauḍ al hayāt*,” 294.

²⁹. *Amr takuṇ ḍ a*, 144.

Ernst provides a list of these microcosmic / macrocosmic correspondences 30 – for example: head / sky, body / earth, waking / day etc. – and suggests that they derive from purely Arabic sources, perhaps from the Treatises of the Brethren of Purity.³¹

The relationship macrocosm / microcosm is a constant in Indic thought. In the *tantra* of Kashmir, each level of the human body is linked to a vast network of worlds, a complex of parallel universes. The Kula initiation ceremony bestows mastery over all the worlds tied to the level of the body – stomach, the throat, the eye-brow – that has been impacted by the ceremony. In this way the initiate, who is a microcosm, has power over the macrocosm.

The re-writer of the *Amr takuṇ ḍ a* does not pursue this tantric path of identification and its corresponding empowerment. Did he wish to prevent any sense of infringement on the absolute lordship of Allah? He allows a connection between macrocosm and microcosm, but a comparison only, a linkage, an association.

Chapter 2 The Breath

The role of breath is a major theme throughout the *Amr takuṇ ḍ a*. The text discusses the health benefits of bringing the ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ breaths into balance. “If these phases are joined, no pain will touch them, no suffering.... They will remain young, strong, they will not grow old.”³²

The text then mentions the five breaths – upwards, downwards etc.,–which are associated with the five elements, fire, water, air, earth and ether, but does not elaborate.

Breath is also divinatory. A wise ‘judge’, on noticing the circumstances in which one of the nostrils predominates, can predict the future. For example, if breathing takes place in the right nostril during intercourse, the

³⁰. Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga,” 213-214.

³¹. Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga,” 215.

³². *Amr takuṇ ḍ a*, 150.

concept us will be male. If in the left, it will be female.³³ Breath also gives knowledge of secrets. For example, “If you wish to join the hidden world, and see that which is to be found there, focus the pupils of your eyes on the nostrils such as to see the septum of the nose”³⁴

The focus on the two breaths is a staple of *haṭ ha yoga* and tantric practice, for they are linked to the *iḍ ā* and *piñ gala* currents that rise from perineum and crisscross the body to join at the eye-brow centre, the *bhrūmadhya*. The two nostrils most often function alternately with a consequent lack of balance but when opened concurrently they lead to full awareness. In fact, the aim is to achieve identity with the god, Śiva, who is symbolized by HA and the goddess, Śakti, who is symbolized by Ṭ HA. Their union is *haṭ ha*. The practitioner becomes identified with them, and so achieves divinity and mastery.

The re-writer recommends balancing the breaths for the sake of health and even of secret knowledge, but does not promote identification with the Godhead.

Chapter 3 The Heart

This chapter expounds the ‘science of the heart’, which Greppi deems to be a Sufi technique.³⁵ It gives details on how to meditate on the sectors of the heart that are connected with the twelve signs of the zodiac – another macrocosmic / microcosmic correspondence. By calmly focusing on the heart, the practitioner begins to perceive good and evil, for an angel is located on the right and the devil on the left. The right is to be expanded so that it absorbs the left.³⁶ As a result, the practitioner will know the secret of happiness, “the state of the prophets, the saints and the pure.”³⁷

³³. Husain, “*Ḥauḍ al hayāt*,” 297.

³⁴. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 152. This yogic practice is called *bhrūmadhya-ḍ ṣ ṭ i*. The text also recommends other *haṭ hayoga* practices such *trāṭ aka* and *khecārī-mudrā*, *siṃha-āsana* and *śitalī*. Greppi, *L'origine del metodop sicofisico esicasta*, 152-153

³⁵Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico oesicasta*, 153.

³⁶. Husain, “*Ḥauḍ al hayāt*,” 298.

³⁷. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 156.

Kashmir Shaivism attaches immense importance to the heart, but in a different way. In *Tantrāloka* 3.69 Abhinavagupta identifies the Goddess and the heart, the very centre, the essence of all things. By knowing the heart, one knows the blessedness of the divine couple. The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* allows entry to the state of the prophets but not into the state of the Divine.

Chapter 4 Postures

The text goes on to speak of five out of eighty-four postures. The posture is to be taken up while simultaneously reciting a sacred word. The levels of benefit progress from physical healing to becoming a 'spirit'.

1.	<i>padma-āsana</i>	good effects on the body , kidneys, limbs and spine ; it helps digestion, etc.
2.	similar to the first	heals varicose veins, leprosy, haemorrhoids etc.
3.	<i>kukkuṭ ā sana</i>	"lessens the element of 'water' and increases the elements of 'fire', 'air' and 'earth', and leads to "the intermediate state between men and angels". ³⁸
4.	<i>uttānakūrmāsana</i>	"... fear and terror toward men and ḡ inn cease, as is necessary if there is to be harmony between heaven and earth." ³⁹
5.	unidentified, perhaps like one of the previous	"joins the mystic flight and becomes one of the many spirits." ⁴⁰

Yoga has eight 'limbs,' which lead from the outer to the inner dimensions. Many of these are observable in the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*. The abstinences (*yama*) and observances (*niyama*) are reflected in chapter IV

" ... the rational soul dissipates itself through eating, drinking, sex, sleeping, chatting, through being a friend of bad people ; it asks for mundane things, vain beauty and concupiscence. If [the disciple] abandons

³⁸. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 162.

³⁹. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 163.

⁴⁰. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 163.

these things and is content with what is necessary, he is in the middle path.”⁴¹

The postures (*āsana*) are treated in chapter IV, breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) in II, withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*) in X, concentration (*dhāraṇā*) in VII and VIII. The final two limbs, meditation (*dhyana*) and absorption (*samādhi*) are not so clearly treated.

The figure of Matsyendra links *haṭha yoga* and the *Kula tantric* ritual. So far, the *Amṛtakūṇḍa* has emphasized elements from *haṭha yoga* but it now shifts to themes that are more clearly tantric.

Chapter 5 The Soul

The text notes that the human soul comes from the natural heat of the body and says that “... the seat of the soul is the stomach; and [the stomach] is like a liquid mountain on which the soul, like a rope, is wrapped”.⁴² The two extremities of the rope go into the stomach, each with three strands, of which three go up and three go down to purify everything and make the blood circulate. Where these branches do not go there is no sensitivity or movement.⁴³ Therefore, there must be no dissipation of life through the strands. Indeed, these two contrary movements must be kept in such balance⁴⁴ that the ‘liquid mountain’ can continue to enliven the soul.

The text then goes on to introduce three sets of three. Their role in the text is a little obscure but all three seem to involve the breath, which leads to ‘the water of life’. “The movement of breath is the nourishment of life.”⁴⁵

⁴¹. Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta*, 159-160.

⁴². *Amṛtakūṇḍa*, 165.

⁴³. Husain, “Ḥaḍḍ al hayāt,” 299.

⁴⁴. Husain, “Ḥaḍḍ al hayāt,” 300.

⁴⁵. *Amṛtakūṇḍa*, 165.

Qur'anic figures	Hindu figures	Natural figures	Natural functions
<i>Hidr</i> , who is found at the junction of the two seas (Qur'an 18.60), and who enlightens Moses whose knowledge is deficient.	Gorakh	Foetus	'breathes' in the placenta,
Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of a fish.	<i>Minanath</i> (Matsyendra) who hears the secret teaching while in the belly of a fish	Fish	'breathes' in the water,
Elijah, who is often pictured as flying in heaven like a bird and sitting in a tree.	Caurangi is restored to life under a tree by Gorakh and Matsyendra	Tree	draws water from the ground and brings it to the top

"They are the ones who have reached the water of life"⁴⁶the subtle energy which rises up the spinal column.⁴⁷If the practitioner follows their example he will tap into the same source and have direct vision of the invisible world.⁴⁸ The text has come to its central theme, the 'water of life'.

The images of mountain and wrapping are found in tantric teaching also but are presented differently, for the *kundalin*, namely the spiritual energy, is wrapped like a serpent around a *ligam* of stone located in the perineum. The tantric practices awaken the serpent, who is the dormant goddess *Śakti*, so that it rises up the body to reach the crown of the head and unite with the god *Śiva*, there to enjoy the bliss of divine intercourse.

⁴⁶. *Amr takuṣ ḍ a*, 166.

⁴⁷. Greppi, *L'origine del metodopsicofisicoesicasta*, 165.

⁴⁸. Husain, "Ḥauḍ al hayāt," 300.

Chapter 6 The Retention of the Seminal Fluid

The text speaks about the relationship of men and women. Marriage is permitted till the age of 30 so as to maintain the human race; after that the initiate should practice chastity. To achieve this, it is recommended to travel, to adopt an ascetical mode of life, to fast, to live far from women.⁴⁹

There is more. After giving practical advice on how to forget sexual pleasure, the text goes on to introduce, ever so briefly, the practice of *vajrolī-mudrā*, which is described in the *Haṭṭ ha-yoga-pradīpikā*.⁵⁰ The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* states,

“Your soul dwells in itself and recollects itself, sucking in the seed in the way that you suck in water through a long straw. When you have done this, you will in fact have filled your body with the water of life at all times.”⁵¹

The text specifically associates semen with the ‘water of life’. Its retention fills the body with life. By contrast, emission has negative consequences, for a person’s “... strength weakens when there is the emission of seed.”⁵²

“The ‘*āqil*’⁵³ regrets the emission of seed and is sad; the wise person and all animals [know this] naturally because the soul experiences pain at this instinctive crudeness, at the violation of this substance.”⁵⁴

While the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* warns against women, sexuality is inferred in its title. The Sanskrit word *kuṇ ḍ a* refers to a sacrificial fire-pit but is also code for the *puḍendum muliebre*. The term *amṛ ta* refers more widely to ambrosia,

⁴⁹. Husain, “Ḥauḍ al hayāt,” 300.

⁵⁰. Tara Michaël, *Haṭṭ ha-yoga-pradīpikā, Traité Sanskrit de Haṭṭ ha-yoga* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 194-200.

⁵¹. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 171. The practice as described, which would seem to be impossible, can be done with a tube. See Richard A. Darmon, “*VajrolīMudrā*, la rétention séminale chez les yogis *vāmācārī*” in *Images du corps dans le monde hindou*, (éd.), Véronique Bouillier et Gilles Tarabout (Paris: CRNS Editions, 2002), 212-240.

⁵². *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 170.

⁵³. This is a *sūfī* term for an initiate. Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta*, 171.

⁵⁴. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 171.

the elixir of life, the fountain of youth, but can also refer to the seminal fluid, both of the man but especially of the woman. The title has tantric resonances.

The retention has beneficial effects, for the semen 'goes up the spine'.⁵⁵ The 'water of life', which would be dissipated in sexual emission is now redirected and is felt to go up the spine, leading to an increase of vitality and to the opening of the chakras with all their powers, and producing the fullness of being.

The three related forms of 'retention' – the stilling of breath, the cessation of thought, and the withholding of semen – are typically associated in the *tantra* practices of Kashmir. The more a person becomes perfect in yogic practice, the more the breath slows down to the point of almost stopping. The cessation of thought (*nirvikalpa*) is the typical state of mind in the most advanced *Kula* practitioner. The retention of semen is recommended in the *Kula* ritual. "Even while involved in sexual union he is perfectly mindful, his body utterly tranquil, ... he is fully enlightened ... he is free....and during the performance of the ritual of the left, always retains his seed."⁵⁶ Emission of semen is an immersion into time and space while its retention relieves from such limitations. Retention does not mean suppression; it does not involve the elimination of sexuality but its mastery.

Chapter 7 The Imagination

The microcosm exists in a potential state before becoming actual. The power of the imagination, the active element in incantation and invocation, in sacred words and magic, makes all things possible.⁵⁷ The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* shows how this is done.

⁵⁵. Greppi, *L'origine del metodopsicofisico esicasta*,168.

⁵⁶. Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka*,3358.

⁵⁷. Husain, "Ḥ auḍ al ḥ ayāt," 301.

It links planets, *cakras*, *yantras* (mystic diagrams)⁵⁸ and mantras (as best as the translator could capture them) and their Arabic substitutes.⁵⁹

Planet	Chakra	Colour of the Yantra	Mantra	Dhikr	Some of the benefits
Saturn	Seat	Reddish gold	huṃ	Yā Rabb O Lord	A vision of joy.
Mars	Genitals	Dark red	Āwm	Yā Qadīm O Everlasting One	“There will be no one whom he does not overcome.” 60
Jupiter	Navel	Yellow gold	Rahin	YāHaliq O Creator	“He will traverse long distances in just one hour.” ⁶¹
Sun	Heart	Reddish yellow	Barīnsarīn	Yā Karīm, Yā Rahim O Generous One, O Merciful One	He hears the words of angels.
Venus	Throat	White	brāy	Yā Musahhir, O Instigator (of things to the service of mankind)	The ginn, men and especially women will love him.

⁵⁸. Greppi draws some of these in her translation of the *Amr takuṇ ḡ a*, pp.176-178, as does Husain in his Arabic text.

⁵⁹. Greppi, *L'origine del metodo psicofisico esicasta*, 139.

⁶⁰. *Amr takuṇ ḡ a*, 176.

⁶¹. *Amr takuṇ ḡ a*, 176.

Mercury	Eyebrows	Lightning flash	ywm	yā 'Alīm O Knowing One	He acquires fullness of knowledge.
Moon	Brain	White	hanṣāyaṣya	Ya Muhyī O Life-Giver	Poisons will have no effect.

The practitioner draws the *yantra* with the prescribed colour and focuses on it until it becomes real and its inner essence is grasped. At the same time, the practitioner recites the prescribed mantra or *dhikr*, “from the heart and not the tongue”.⁶² By the power of the imagination the *yantra* has become a live force. By drawing all these elements together and projecting them onto the chakra he awakens all the powers available in it, progressively so till he reaches the crown of the head.

The text adds further details concerning the 7th chakra. It is the place “where there is a substance comparable to seminal fluid that seems to flow from the centre of the head towards the feet.”⁶³ This is the ‘pool of nectar’ that enlivens the whole body, moving in a different direction to that described in chapter V where the focus is on the stomach.

The Sanskrit term *bhāvana* has a double meaning. It means ‘imagination’ and ‘bringing into being’. The act of imagining is effective, for it brings into being that which is imagined. It forms the substance of this chapter.

If the planets and the sacred Muslim words are omitted, the practice is typically tantric. As the catch phrase puts it, ‘*tantra* is *mantra* plus *yantra*’. Typically, as in tantric texts, benefits are promised to the practitioner. In the *Amṛ takuṇḍā* they constitute a mixture, drawing also on Muslim themes, but all are concerned with power and success, which again is typically tantric, for one of the many purposes of tantric practice is to acquire ‘supernatural powers’ (*siddhi*).

⁶². *Amṛ takuṇḍā* 175.

⁶³. *Amṛ takuṇḍā* 178.

The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* goes on to speak of a particular *siddhi*, namely mastery over death. The practitioner first meditates on all seven chakras and then enters another body, whether alive or dead. The dead human, for example, will revive and eat, drink and speak, as long as the practitioner stays within that body.⁶⁴ One can easily imagine the practical advantages of this power.

Chapter 8 The Signs of Death

This chapter continues with the topic of death, and describes ways of discerning the signs of its approach.

It also provides the way of countering death. The practitioner should meditate on the seven chakras described in chapter 7 and imagine them all as one. Then, ["from these centres] water will gush forth, like the water of the seminal fluid, over your entire body."⁶⁵ The text, ever more clearly, links the 'water of life' with seminal fluid. What gave life to a child can be used to regenerate the body.

The issue in the *tantra* of Kashmir is not how to avoid death but how to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth. Indeed, it wishes to bring together the four purposes of life, which are righteousness, possession, pleasure and liberation. Liberation from the cycle of rebirth is usually opposed to the first three and is achievable only after death. The tantric aim, by contrast, is "to place *kāma*- pleasure - (in all the meanings of that term) and the values which are associated with it, at the service of liberation,"⁶⁶ and to become 'liberated while living'.

Chapter 9 The Spiritual 'Energies'

The Arabic term *rūḥ ānīyya* is translated as 'spiritual energy' 'spirit' or 'soul, a term which is also used in some Arabic translations for the Greek word *theos*, 'a god'.⁶⁷

⁶⁴. Abhinavagupta speaks of this in *Tantrāloka* 13.234b-235 and 24.13b-15.

⁶⁵. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 184.

⁶⁶. Madeleine Biardeau, quoted in André Padoux, *Recherches sur la symbolique et l'énergie de la parole dans certains textes tantriques* (Paris: Institut de civilisation indienne, 1975), 5.

⁶⁷. Ernst, "The Islamization of Yoga," 222.

There are in the macrocosm seven categories of spirits or spiritual energies, each of which possesses seven orders except for one of them which has ten. That is true also of the human microcosm⁶⁸ where the spirits preside over the chakras of the body. The practitioner will now call on them.

Although the number of chakras is 7, and each is presided over by a *yoginī*, *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* retains the number 64 (=8x8), “there are 64 spiritual energies and heads of spiritual energies”.⁶⁹ This inconsistency reveals the Indic background, which gives a significant place to the eight ‘Mothers’ (*mātrkā*) each of whom is surrounded by eight lesser goddesses.⁷⁰

Planet	Chakra	<i>Yoginī</i>
Saturn	Seat	<i>Kālkā</i>
Mars	Genitals	<i>Batarma</i>
Jupiter	Navel	<i>Mankal</i>
Sun	Heart	<i>Badata</i>
Venus	Throat	<i>Saras[ṽ]atī</i>
Mercury	Eyebrows	<i>Nārī</i>
Moon	Brain	<i>Tūtlā</i>

The practitioner should go to a room that has been thoroughly cleaned and perfumed with incense and rose water and then practice breathing, making use of the *yantra* and sacred formulas which in this chapter are far longer than in chapter VI.⁷¹ He should breathe on his body and clothing, calmly and without causing harm to any living creature.

⁶⁸. Husain, “Ḥauḍ al hayāt,” 302.

⁶⁹. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 186.

⁷⁰. Hypaethral temples to the 64 *Yoginīs* once widespread in India can still be found, for example at Hirapur near Bhubaneswar in Odisha State.

⁷¹. For example, the mantra for the first chakra is *āwm, hūm, alkadhṛqi, mārā, yblah, alka, kūrḱ, hūm, rāk, rāk, mīn, tūrā, rās, nūt, sa'l, rahīn, hyāws, fārs, ḡ ūḡ āhḍ, krbān, chārs, narīn, narīn, riš, riš, kāws, ānh, tānat, kryāth, ḥ kārs, āy, brmā, hn, dwāds, āwm, hr, hr, hr*.

These ‘spiritual energies’ are called *yoginīs*. The Arabic writer uses this term, perhaps not realizing its significance, for “The *yoginīs* of legend are fearsome apparitions who are both wildly dangerous and the source of great boons. They radiate from the heart of the deity as sources of power which govern time and space and send out further emanations of female powers which are visible in the sacred sites and cremation grounds. ... By placating these hordes ..., the devotee gained the ascendancy and so secured their powers over the cosmos etc. ... The cult of the *yoginīs* seems to have been the earliest form of what becomes the *Kula* tradition.”⁷²

The *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* names seven of them, one of which is clearly *Sarasvatī* the consort of the god Brahma and patroness of wisdom. The spelling ‘*Kālkā*’ may be an attempt to transcribe *Kālī* or *Kālikī*, the black and fearsome goddess who dances on the body of her recumbent consort, the god Śiva, and who inhabits the cremation ground. The Arabic reviser uses these names, surely without realizing fully the significance of the *yoginī* /goddesses.

They are described in detail. The first is *Kālkā*, black, big, with four hands, all-knowing and with a beauty that inspires veneration. She requires her *mantra* to be recited 3000 times a day, and on the seventh day she will appear, causing tremendous fear. The text then advises: “Tell her she is as a sister or mother to you. Then ask what you wish. And she will want it too.”⁷³ The others are visualized in much the same manner.

Texts such as the *Karpūrādi-stotra*⁷⁴ visualize seminal exchange with the goddesses. The Muslim writer avoids any such suggestion. To emphasize

⁷² John Dupuche, *Abhinavagupta: The Kula Ritual as elaborated in chapter 29 of the Tantraloka*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003), 13-14.

⁷³ *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 188

⁷⁴ John Dupuche, “The “Scandalous” Tantric Hymn to Kālī *Karpūrādi-stotra*: an Unexpurgated Translation,” *International Journal of Tantric Studies* 8.1 (2012). https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1179/1/IJTS%2C_The_Scandalous_Tantric_Hymn_to_K%C4%81%C4%AB_-_Karpuradi-stotra_-_an_Unexpurgated_Translation%2C_MCDUD.pdf

the point, the text recommends absolute chastity. "If you are not faithful to your renunciation, little or nothing will come to you."⁷⁵ He speaks rather of the practitioner becoming a brother or a son to them, and so obtaining supernatural powers, which include the following: victory over enemies, wisdom and the gift of writing, the status of a prophet. The boons most frequently requested in the text are the gift of prophecy and fraternity.

The term *kula* means 'family' or 'clan'. By extension it refers to the whole cosmos and since the cosmos is deemed to be born from the supreme goddess, she herself is called *Kula*. The many families of 'goddesses' or spiritual beings that spring from her have authority over the worlds that have been assigned to them. An aim of tantric practitioner is so to please one or other of these goddesses that she grants him all her powers. He does so by offering semen and blood.

Having commenced with *haṭ ha yoga*, the text has now entered a strongly tantric world although the writer has down played many elements that would be incompatible with Islam.

Chapter 10 In Conclusion

This chapter sums up the essence of the *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a* and gives several recommendations to complete the mystic journey. "... The microcosm is like a tree that has been turned upside down."⁷⁶ What seems to be inverted down is in fact the right way up. The practitioner will seek the "waters of life" which are to be found especially in the head and in the macrocosm above the head. The 'roots' are above, not below. By withdrawing from the senses, he will join macrocosm to microcosm and drink of the waters of life without limit. He will come to know external things truly, for all his senses will be well directed.

⁷⁵. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 191.

⁷⁶. *Amṛ takuṇ ḍ a*, 192.

In Kashmir Shaivism, the 'fool' does not have the mind of Śiva and therefore suffers from a false perception of reality and its *karmic* results. By acquiring the mind of Śiva and its energies, by contrast, the *tantric* practitioner enjoys life to the full and always acts justly and freely.

Note: A short appendix is added describing the form of the heart, which is like a pine cone with its point facing downwards.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

The *Amṛ takuṇḍā* engaged many Muslim readers who sought whatever might help them on their spiritual path. In their engagement with an Indic text they found much that was challenging. For example, where Islam proposes submission to the will of Allah, the *Kula tantra* proposes identity with the Deity and complete freedom. Where Islam enjoins a righteous conduct of life modeled on the life of Muhammad, the *Kula* disregards the rules of righteous living so as to rise above the divisive concepts of good and evil, pure and impure, divine and human. Therefore, the Muslim writers were highly eclectic and selective,⁷⁸ showing both fidelity to their own tradition and open-mindedness to other traditions.

This article has sought to highlight the tantric aspects that were preserved in the *Amṛ takuṇḍā*. It has shown that the 'pool of nectar' is a source of vitality akin to seminal fluid. It is made to flow by the concatenation of macrocosm and microcosm, by the practice of invocation and recitation, by the power of breath and visualization. All these influences combine to make the 'water', preserved from dissipation, move in the bodily chakras so as to lead the practitioner ever upwards, bestowing vitality and supernatural powers, every joy and benefit both heavenly and earthly, and so to reach the fullness of life.

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⁷⁷. Husain, "Ḥauḍ al hayāt," 304.

⁷⁸. Ernst, "The Islamization of Yoga," 220.

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REVISITING MONOTHEISM (*TAWHID*) AND JESUS (*ISA*), THE JEW

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PREAMBLE:

Monothism is fundamental to the Semitic traditions representing one of the largest global populations of believers. Belief in One God is strictly adhered to in monotheism and some social anthropologists as well as historians of religion are of the view that the belief in the oneness of God is a high point in the history and development of human beliefs. However, in the history of religious thought and development, one cannot overlook the teaching of the Persian prophet in the person of Zarathustra¹ who preached on the notion of the highest good in *Ahura Mazda* in constant conflict with *Angra Mainyu*². This notion either predates or is juxtaposed with the notion and the nuances behind the Hebrew concept of *Adonai*³ or *Yahweh*⁴. Some scholars say that monotheism is not necessarily a Hebro-Jewish construct exclusively but part of the Indo-Persian religious background, which is identified with the Persian prophet Zarathustra, his historical period his life and work is disputed⁵.

Jesus hails from the stock of Jesse⁶, going back to David, Moses and to Abraham. It is in the patriarch Abraham's tradition that scholars find the common lineage through Isaac and Ishmael who are also part of the monotheistic traditions of the Semitic cultures. Being born into an ordinary

¹. There is a separate reference of Zoroastrian view in the main text later. There is no scholarly evidence when he lived. Some scholars still date him in the 7th and 6th century BCE as a near-contemporary of Cyrus the great and Darius.

². These two concepts are explained later in the main text with a separate footnote.

³. The name of God most often used in the Hebrew Bible is *Yeloim*. *Adonai* literally means 'my Lord'

⁴. According to Jewish law, Jews are forbidden to say the name of God (YAHWEH). Instead of saying it as it is written, Jews are commanded to replace it with the word *adonai* which means Lord.

⁵. See. <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/zoroastriaism>

⁶. In the Old Testament, the father of David. Jesse was the son of *Ohed*, and the grandson of Boaz and Ruth. He was a farmer and sheep breeder in Bethlehem. David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. The biblical reference to the (root of Jesse, stump of Jesse or stock of Jesse) in (Is. 11:1), It's one of the Jewish Messianic texts in the book of Isaiah.

Jewish family, going through the rite of circumcision and other customs, Jesus embraces his Jewish religious heritage even though he became increasingly aware of the plight of his people and of a land subjugated by the Roman rule⁷.

Monotheism was not discussed during his time as it was deeply linked to the religio-cultural habitat he was born into whose religious formation was under a rabbinate that was institutionally and historically central in the life of a Jewish family. However, the emperor Augustus was divinized⁸ and

7. The first key text that is worth examining is the story surrounding the birth of Jesus. Luke, the historian, medical doctor-evangelist's birth narrative is perhaps the text that directly makes reference to the Roman Empire. However, Luke's detailed accounts of certain miracles and descriptive illnesses in this narrative are being show that he could have been a physician. Scholars do not agree on this inference. The Caesar, Augustus had issued a decree that the whole world would be counted. This was so that the emperor would be able to tax the people with greater accuracy. Emperor Augustus would have used the money to fund his military, for building expansion projects, and for overall imperial control. Taxation was part of a system designed to maintain the security of *Pax Romana* - Peace of Rome. This systemic taxation made those in Judea and surrounding areas find themselves either as part of the morally compromised, colluding aristocracy, or in poverty. This is the world in which Jesus was born. An illuminating exegesis of Colossians, rooted in solid knowledge of the Old Testament background and the first-century Roman imperial context of the New Testament, is extrapolated by Walsh and Keesmaat for our discussion here. Cf. Brian J. Walsh & Sylvia. C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004).

8. It has already been established that Caesar Augustus was called the 'son of god' who in the first century, Rome had complete dominion over Israel. In 63 BCE, after much turmoil and civil war within Israel, the Romans invaded and conquered Jerusalem, their holiest city. In order to keep control over the Galilean and Judean people, Julius Caesar and the Senate installed Herod the great as king. It would take Herod three years to finally gain control over the still hostile Jews. He eventually became one of Augustus' favorite military leaders, and was admired by the new emperor. Not only did Herod expand the Temple in Jerusalem to be more grandiose and Hellenistic-Roman in style, but also imposed a sacrifice that the priests would offer on behalf of Rome and the emperor which to a Jewish mind was a complete abomination. Additionally, Herod had whole cities named to give reverence to Caesar as well as imperial temples and fortresses to reinforce Roman control. The great building campaigns were not possible without taxing the peoples of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea greatly; leaving the majority in poverty. Any attempt to oppose the empire was welcomed by the desperate masses. Rebellions were frequent, and Jesus was seen as one such manifestation. His role as an itinerant preacher was in a hostile terrain. It was Herod Antipas the son of the celebrated Herod the great who headed the trial of Jesus. For detailed discussion, See. Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25. Also see. John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," in *The Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of*

celebrated in the empire and any compromise with the belief in one God⁹ in the Jewish territories was unacceptable and religiously repudiated in the Jewish mind.

Jesus was religiously part of this largely traditionalist Jewry and expressed his own displeasure at the rule imposed by the Romans and the harsh experience of occupation, subjugation and shameful taxation of the ordinary people. But his intense critique was primarily internal, self-critical and focused on renewal towards self-transformation, which was fundamental to his core preaching.

He was aware of the political radicalism against the Roman subjugation, evident in the politically motivated activities of the radical Zealots.¹⁰ In fact there was one close associate of Jesus among his twelve, who was sympathetic towards the 'zealot cause'. His acceptance of dissent even among his close companions was loud and clear in his preaching. The sense of containment and his inclusive attitude amid resentment and alienation attracted the multitude to his preaching but it obviously raised alarm in the political elite and the religious orthodoxy. The religious leadership as well as the political elites had a keen eye on the 'new preacher' who had appeared on the streets of Galilee. They wondered whether he might be a new phase of the 'zealot cause' or the Jewish Messianic utopia against Rome.

JESUS THE PREACHER

Faithful Resistance, (ed.), Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

⁹. Jews traditionally do not pronounce the word but instead refer to God as *HaShem*, literally 'the Name'. *Adonai* means, my Lord' -*Kyrios* is the Greek counterpart, indicating the oneness of God. All these subtle meanings are to express the 'complete and absolute transcendence of God' even though the New Testament takes a different perspective in its theological development.

¹⁰. This word refers to members of an ancient Jewish sect aiming at a world Jewish theocracy and resisting the Romans until CE 70. However, now the word is used in English about a person who has very strong opinions about something and tries to convince other people about them.

Jesus' preaching was deeply imbedded in renewal and the freedom to believe, to be authentically human according to the will of the creator whom he believed to be the author of life. His association with his contemporaries and more significantly the marginalized people¹¹ alongside his radical teaching on the 'reign of God' made the authorities suspicious. The political and the religious leadership thought that he might have links with the Zealot movement, which according to them, was opposed to Rome and the emperor. This later became the central accusation for both the political and the religious camps to convict their common enemy on the basis that he 'violated their conduct and life-style and more assertively Rome and the rule of the emperor'. A mutually beneficial project to end a possible rebellion to both the political and the religious orthodoxy was in the making.

The New Testament inferences are clear that Jesus was called rabbi but was more popular as an itinerant teacher. This indicated the public acceptance of his erudition in the Torah (Teaching, also known as the Five Books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings) - hence TaNaKh (*Tenakh*). His understanding of his own Jewishness, innovative knowledge, insight into Jewish folklore, eschatology, Messianism and his cross-cultural competence made him a different kind of a teacher with a different message that was attractive to Jews and non-Jews alike. Hence, his preaching and life style remained controversial and was misunderstood by the religious authorities and other elements of his own society. He remained steadfast in his fundamental commitment to a renewed religious perspective and the practice of the ancient religion of his ancestor, the patriarch Abraham, the other patriarchs, prophets and the messianic movement itself. The fanatical Jewish listeners were focused on Jesus because they wanted to shape their own image of the messiah, an image that Jesus disowned very early in his preaching. People found a lucid

¹¹. There were as per the Gospel(s) and the Acts there are two Greek words used, 1. *Hoi Polloi*, 2. *Laos*. The first refers to the *multitude* that followed this new preacher in Palestine, some of them became his ardent followers and others considered him a good man, listened to him but went back to their own known worlds. The second group, *Laos* refers to people who took his preaching more seriously and opted to his WAY (which is what Christ's preaching was called during the time of Paul) of life.

preacher in Jesus. God was presented to them not as lawmaker but as a loving father (*Abba*)¹², which is described as the ‘God experience’ of Jesus. His famous prayer was a response to his disciples when they requested him to teach them how to pray¹³ in which his experience was enunciated vividly. It has become a prayer accepted by most Christians globally.

HEBREW *ADONAI* AND *ABBA*

It is historically and even theologically pertinent to explore whether Jesus was a monotheist. To investigate whether the Christian concept of God is in keeping with the monotheism of both Judaism and Islam, the two rival cousins of the Abrahamic stock¹⁴, is an important theological discussion. Judaism, Islam and their schools of thought have had a historical issue that Christian theology misrepresented the version of the monotheistic understanding of God by the interpretation of the concept of Messiah (for Jews) and the doctrine of Trinity (for Muslims and Jews). This is the theological bone of contention among these three traditions and perhaps is the reason why some tend to call them rival cousins. However, it is also a fact that Christians across the theological spectrum would disagree both with Judaism and Islam on the question of the place and the importance of the ‘Jesus Event’ and the person of himself within all of their catechesis, theology, preaching, liturgy and their modern institutions. The centrality of the risen Christ is the basis of their theology.

I am trying here to visualize some imaginative image of Jesus discussing and debating with 4th and 5th century CE scholars and theologians on the doctrine of God as Trinity and perhaps refusing to sign up to the Nicene Creed.¹⁵ He (*Arius*) might be taking the further step of agreeing with both

¹². Aramaic term to mean ‘father’, which seems to be the word used by Jesus (*Isa*) whose spoken language was Aramaic. His radical use of the word to address God was very un-Jewish but this was his approach to understand God’s nature in his context and imagination.

¹³. See Mt. 6:9-13

¹⁴. This would mean a descendant, branch of the family or stock. The Messianic king was to be of the family of Jesse, the father of David. Paul quotes the Septuagint of Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12. Jesus is a branch or descendant of the family of Jesse, as well as of David. In fact, it is the same stock of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

¹⁵ .*Arius* (250 or 256–336), native a Libyan presbyter and ascetic, and priest in *Baucalis* in Alexandria, Egypt. His teachings about the nature of the Godhead in

Jews and Muslims in later centuries to tell Christians that they have got the issue of monotheism twisted and embark on a more counterpointed understanding of God-self. I also wish to imagine the response of Jesus about him being made the second person of this complicated 'theological soup,' which he perhaps considers as under-developed and ill prepared as an article of faith and practice in history. However, it must be noted that it is not necessary for Jesus to have thought and spoken of himself in the same way as his followers and others thought and spoke about him in later decades after his eventful life and his violent death by crucifixion. This faith-based conviction of life, death and resurrection is affirmed by today's Christians in their savior-figure in the person of Jesus, which became a fully developed doctrine within the Christian theology of salvation (soteriology). It is not a contestable issue for the Christian story because it has been the foundation of the faith of Christians throughout the centuries and without this core Kerygma¹⁶ the Christian could fall apart.

But the question as to whether Jesus was a monotheist remains most intriguing and worthy of investigation. His Jewish credentials remain impeccable but introduce a new understanding of God and the view that the life of love was over and above the obligation to the law because God's magnanimity transcends all law. This is what Jesus preached, cherished and promoted as the reign of God.

This fundamental perspective in the life of Jesus is what sometimes made him a *persona non grata* (unacceptable) to the religious orthodoxy of his time and a political threat to the regime in power. He withstood both at the cost of his life because he dared to say what he did and put into practice

Christianity, Oneness of God emphasized God's uniqueness and Christ's subordination under the Father, and the Arian opposition to what would become the dominant Christology made him a primary topic of the first Council of Nicaea, which was convened by Emperor Constantine the great in 325.

¹⁶ *Kerygma*, (Gk. *kerugma*) meaning to preach or proclaim. See also (Luke 4:18-19, Romans 10:14, Matthew 3:1). The term is frequently used by 'kerygmatic' theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth to describe the act of preaching that calls for an existential faith in the meaning of Jesus.

what he preached (*yathavadi thathakari, thathavadi yathakari*/Pali equivalent in Buddhist scriptures).

For Christians, the end of life was not the death of their master because he rose from the dead so that others too may live. This witness was bold because Jesus believed that God always cherished life. Through Jesus, the God of life reaffirmed the supremacy of God over creation because the political and religious men could only put men and women to death. This became the Christian kerygma (proclamation of the Gospel/*injil*).

JESUS, SHEMA AND SHAHADA

The Gospels are clear about the monotheistic inclinations of Jesus as recorded by the Evangelists, especially the Hebrew-Jewish Shema (faith declaration/*Shahada*) on which Jesus often based his teaching, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength". Interestingly, according to the Evangelists, the 'Jesus formula' also includes the phrase from the Leviticus (19.18) "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" which is arguably central to his teaching but not reducible to the love ethic alone. For Jesus his Jewish Shema was normative for an orientation of life while the second command for him was evidently praxis and a touchstone for ethical behavior towards another. The two commands go together, the second is founded on the first, and the first is practiced in the second. Jesus reprimands Satan (in the synoptic Gospels) in the temptation narrative¹⁷ by saying that one should worship only "the Lord your God and serve only him". It indicates an unreserved monotheism in his pedagogy and orientation. No compromise is made on the question of monotheism. Jesus shows his Jewish characteristic and rejects Satan's proposition for deviant conduct. Satan, the tempter, is perplexed about Jesus' resilience and faith

¹⁷. The synoptic Gospels (Mt. 4:1-11, Lk. 4:1-13) have the longest description while (Mk. 1:12-13) has just one reference to the story, because his concern about his protagonist, Jesus as a someone journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem with severe confrontations, witnessing to his option in life as man of God with an uncompromising monotheistic (*tawhid*) agenda.

in one God (*tawhid*) despite the lucrative power on offer with craving and indulgence (*tanha & abhramana*: Buddhist view). Jesus refuses the agenda of Satan, evil as it deviated from the Jewish heritage and *Shema/Shahada*.

There is another incident in the Gospel according to Mark (10:7-18), where one reads about Jesus' uninhibited rejection of a title bestowed on him. When he was addressed as "Good teacher", he seemed annoyed, "why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone". Jesus' argument is clear in both these incidents that for him God alone is worthy of worship and is the pinnacle of goodness. To make a shift in his faith (at the request of 'populism' in the mythic temptation narrative and the 'good teacher' title) would be to undermine the very core of his belief system, which he had inherited as a religious Jew. He did not desire to share the ineffability of Yahweh - the ultimate Goodness and the otherness of God is not and cannot be shared. Hence, he refused to comply with the view of a 'good teacher' ascribed to him.

MONOTHEISM (*TAWHID*) AND PROPHET ZARATHUSTRA

The centrality of God is a unique Jewish influence on the early Christian communities and also on Islam as it emerged out of the Arabian Peninsula centuries later. There are also scholars (Ninian Smart, Frank Reynolds and others) who argue that prior to the Hebrew-Judaic monotheism, the teaching of Zarathustra of Persia (as I referred in the preamble) proclaimed *Ahura Mazda*, the personification of Goodness in constant battle with *Angra Mainyu*, the manifestation of evil or the destructive spirit. It would be instructive for scholarship on monotheism to give some serious thought to the link between the rise of monotheistic faith and its theological development in Zoroastrianism. I am compelled to argue that all three Abrahamic traditions historically are driven back to Zoroastrian thought for their understanding of God as the highest good, the Victor over evil, even though each of the three faiths have revised and systematized their own understanding according to their own theological moorings. To reduce the theological development of monotheism to just the three Abrahamic traditions would undermine the rich religious heritage of humanity and

would limit biblical history to the hegemony of institutional interpretation. Monotheism does not belong solely to any single tradition but is an expression of the broad religious pursuit of humanity as legitimately articulated through specific religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). This particularity of the monotheistic understanding of the God-self might not fully and definitively absorb the universality of the 'Goodness of God'.

Another significant point is the response of Jesus when his disciples requested him to teach them to pray. The evangelists, Matthew and Luke tell us vividly about Jesus' Jewish liturgical orientation so the teaching is placed in a liturgical setting. It is evident that such a formula has a catechetical value expressed through liturgical needs. This surely was the form of worship adopted by the early Christians, especially the Diaspora communities founded by Paul and other elders. Jesus refers in his teaching about prayer to the 'Wholly Other' (Rudolf Otto) as his father (Abba, in Aramaic, endearing words like *Appa*, *Appachchi* or *Thaththa*, as used in Sri Lankan homes, and *abbu*, *walid* in Urdu and Hindi speaking homes) indicate a distinct relationship between a parent and a child. This could refer to a position of equal dignity but the reference to a shared transcendence is most unlikely in Jewish theological terms. The child's (son or daughter) equal dignity could be according to resemblance, qualities, or mannerisms with the child's father, but the father could not be equated with his child. This is both the Jewish and Islamic understanding of God.

Let 'God be God' is a Judeo-Islamic response¹⁸ to this poignant debate and in fact closer to the monotheism of Jesus than appears in the liturgy of Christians since Chalcedon. In all liturgy and worship and personal prayer the devotees or the worshippers take all theology and jurisdiction to their desired devotional plateau where only God would be the credible

¹⁸. It also has Calvinist (John) theological moorings, which Karl Barth, a protestant theologian himself rediscovered in his reading of Calvin while he was a pastor in Geneva. Cf. <https://hendricksonpublishers.blog/2017/05/10/letting-god-be-god-karl-barths-journey-with-john-calvin/> Here Barth goes into extensive discussion on the unparalleled, uncompromising, non-sharable otherness of 'Godhood' - Let God be God. Retrieved 12/07/2019.

respondent and the witness. All theology, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and even the law itself are at the service of this encounter or perhaps made redundant before God and the devotee. The primacy of religious experience over religiously demarcated structures is the core of the practice of a devotee (*bhaktah/Skt.*).

LET GOD BE GOD

Jewish monotheism has not been compromised at least in the New Testament writings except in certain Pauline expressions in some epistles. Jesus makes no mistake in teaching his fundamental-faith-principle to his disciples. His first salutation reference in the popular Lord's Prayer is "hallowed be your name" - strikes the code of holiness according to rabbinic stipulations. That which belongs to God alone (*tawhid*) is not associated with any other. The Messiah is from God but would not be associated with God (*Adonai*). Jesus implies in the prayer that the Hebrew-Jewish 'otherness' of God and sanctity of this 'set-apartness' of Transcendence is incomparable and uncompromising. As a disciplined rabbi, Jesus gives priority to this 'wholly otherness' of *Yahweh/Adonai* and any attempt to compromise is a deviation from the primary belief in the oneness of God (*tawhid*). Any tendency towards a human understanding is idolatry and Jesus in the Gospel (*injl*) is also uncompromisingly Jewish about his ardent rootedness in the 'otherness of the *Abba* father'.

The next supplication in the Lord's prayer- "may your kingdom come"- (some theologians would describe it as the reign of God, (*basileía tou theou* Gk.) was central to the 'Jesus formula' and was the most challenging to the contemporary political structures under which he and his people had to live with heavy taxation, violence and counter-violence. There could not be any other kingdom or reign than that of the Roman emperor. Jesus' radical teaching on the reign of God was an expression of his subtle political critique of the Roman Empire and it once again affirmed his uncompromised monotheism in a society where the emperor was considered godly and supremely powerful over nations. In the reign of God, it is God who rules and God alone deserves loyalty and obedience

and in such a reign while the poor and the marginalized will sit together with all those who think that they are righteous and holy. Jesus went on preaching this one single paradigm of the reign of God in parables, which was the most powerful tool he deployed to teach.

One of the most interesting questions posed to him was on the question of taxation and his politically savvy response was to ask for a physical coin in circulation. His next question to those present was to mention to him the symbols on the coin. All they could do was to declare that the Roman coin displayed the encrypted head of Caesar. Jesus' response was sharp and diplomatic even though politically volatile: "give what is due to Caesar and to God, what God deserves". What continued to be uppermost in his mind was that oneness of God (*tawhid*) could not and would not be compromised for worldly power. In the audience on this occasion were men from the military, Pharisees, lawyers, religious teachers, and the ordinary people who were mesmerized by his intellectual honesty, spiritual rootedness and political awareness. Some in the audience would have thought of him as just a parable teller but, on this occasion, Jesus publicly proclaimed his theological position regarding monotheism, namely, that Caesar and God were incomparable and affirmed that religious principles had the capacity to promote ethical governance and value-laden leadership for nation building and reconciliation. His cross-cultural competence and his interdisciplinary approach was evident to his hears. Such pointed social interactions and political critique quietly but definitively became counted as evidence for his trial as a conspirator against the State, an anti-Roman instigator and violator of the ancient Jewish law. Jesus became a victim of a well-planned conspiracy, but his costly witness to a brutal treatment evoked a WAY that later became Christianity, a tradition built on love, forgiveness and martyrdom. The early Christians, both Jews and non-Jews, understood that Jesus had built the strongest church that could withstand every persecution. Paul of Tarsus alongside the surviving apostles of Jesus

became the signifiers of the alternative power - the reign of God that their master and the Lord preached and for which he gave his life as a witness.

PAUL AND GOD

Paul's adamant but penetrating theological discourse in Athens with his contemporaries of high intellectual caliber was about the unknown God. I am convinced that Paul in this instance was more Jewish than in other preaching or writings and was defending monotheism without any fear of contradiction. Paul would have found it impossible to preach to the erudite Athenians that God's transcendence was to be shared with the 'risen Christ' - who was 'Son of God' as per his belief. His careful choice of words is a good example of his astute display of Jewishness before the Greek world. In typical Pauline fashion, he reclaimed the God of history, whom he now considered as the God of Jesus - to be the unknown God in the Greek world. He became the most devoted missionary to the Greek intellectual world, even though his Greek counterparts in the text were not very convinced of the religio-cultural shift of a hardcore villain to a sober dialoguer and that such conversions were possible as in the case of *Chandaśoka*¹⁹ and *Duttagamini*²⁰ (in the respective dynasties of India and Sri Lanka).

¹⁹. Buddhist legends state that *Aśoka* was bad-tempered and of a wicked and cruel nature. He built *Aśoka's Hell*, an elaborate torture chamber described as a "Paradisal Hell" due to the contrast between its beautiful exterior and the acts carried out within by his appointed executioner, *Girikaa*. This earned him the name of (*Caṇḍa Aśoka*) meaning "*Aśoka the Fierce*" in Sanskrit. Charles Drekmeier cautions that the Buddhist legends tend to dramatize the change that Buddhism brought in him, and therefore, exaggerate *Aśoka's* past wickedness and his piousness after the conversion. There is possibility of change, in fact he became *Dharma Aśoka* (righteous *Aśoka*). See https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/story_fbid. (Also see Unofficial Topper, the fb name for reference). This link refers to a long description of this Mauryan emperor on the aspect of his conversion to righteousness.

²⁰. The Sinhala *Mahavamsa* (great chronicle of Sri Lanka) one could trace several chapters dedicated to *Duttagamini* (*Gamini*, the wicked) and draw a parallel between his life and that of *Chanda Aśoka* (undisciplined *Asoka*, see footnote 17 above). It is known that *Duttagamini* too underwent the same experience of the utter futility of wonton destruction and war he waged. He became a pious ruler through remorse and repentance. The chronicler portrays an *Aśokan* model in the person of *Duttagamini* as a more humane and believable Sinhala ruler compatible with the *Dhamma*. See. Hettiarachchi, S., *Faithing the Native Soil: dilemmas and aspirations of postcolonial Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka* (author publication, Colombo 2012) p. 5 & 6.

Paul (previously known as Saul, the worrier-persecutor of Christians) shows that change is possible all through life. For him, Jesus was everything (“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” Gal. 2:20) after his ‘wow’ religious experience on the road to Damascus (as recorded by Luke in the Acts). Space does not permit me to ascertain who Paul’s God really was and which God he had in his mind when he preached and wrote the most influential writings in the history of Christianity. Was he a Trinitarian or a Christo-centric theologian, obsessively focused on ‘Jesus the preacher’ and ‘Christ the Lord’?

His reprimands and the catechetical warnings to the early Christians indicate that to embrace the ‘Christ Event’ is paramount to living as a Christian. Paul, though Jewish by heritage, was more exposed to Jewish culture than Jesus. Paul, who was born in Tarsus (modern South central Turkey) and studied under an esteemed teacher such as Gamaliel, certainly had a very Jewish understanding of God. More research on Pauline monotheism, not necessarily his Christology, would be an interesting area of Christian theology. Paul’s understanding of God with the encounter of the Christ of faith seemed expanded and displayed a stern counterpoint to the deified-emperor paradigm: for him it’s also a psychological battle with his conversion (*metanoia*/change of direction). There was no other Lord for Paul except the Lordship of Christ, which leads someone like Dominic Crossan to interpret the New Testament narrative as the most programmatic alternative to the decaying empire of Rome. However, by the 4th century CE, the rise of Christendom emerged as yet another empire until its counterpoint appeared with the rise of Islam in the Bedouin world of the 7th century CE. The rest is history.

SEVEN-POINTER CONCLUSION

Was Jesus a monotheist? is an intriguing question to which this paper responds positively. However, whether he was proposing a project with and beyond the Jewish religious tradition is yet another area for which the Gospel (*injl*) is a clear witness. Jesus, being part of a strict monotheistic society of the Hebrew-Jewish tradition, is the specific area that I have

examined in this paper in order to evoke an appropriate discussion among different circles. This discussion could proceed with some reference to Zoroastrianism arguably as one tradition that dwelled on monotheism both pre Christian and pre Islamic periods.

Firstly, ordinary Christians will have an opportunity without the wrappings of different church dogmas of history and painful schisms to better understand the central figure of their faith and practice.

Secondly, Christian scholars and theologians are requested to revisit the subject of their scholarship and research anew in the forgotten or erased Jewishness of Jesus in their writings and theological thinking.

Thirdly, it is noticeable that Christian literature basically has bypassed this single significance of Jesus' Jewishness in the history of anti-Semitic polemics and, therefore, they could revisit, revise and tender a fresh reading of Jesus, the monotheist Jew.

Fourthly, the paper also suggests that Jewish and Muslim readers reconsider their idea of Jesus in the context of their own monotheistic religious views. Neither tradition could bypass Jesus for the obvious reasons that their history and the textual traditions are full of Jesus, the Jew and a prophet.

Fifthly, there could be areas where some theologians and scholars of all three traditions may wish to recommence reflection on the role and place of Jesus, the Jew (for Jews), Jesus the servant-Lord (for Christians) and Isa, a prophet in the Qur'an (for Muslims). It would be an interesting discussion in a new attempt to pursue Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations as in the spirit and the words of the peace declaration, 'human fraternity',²¹ signed by Pope Francis and the grand imam of Al Azhar, Cairo, Ahmed el-Tayeb.

²¹. I quote here the final paragraph of the declaration "this Declaration may be a sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South and between all who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another". Signed on 4 February 2019, Abu Dhabi. This in

Sixthly, the non-Semitic believers of other world religious traditions may have an opportunity to view Jesus as a religious figure of history as part of the global religious landscape, just like their own savior-figures so that they sit not in opposition but in solidarity for the 'common good'. It might also be of interest and value to study the personality of Jesus and his counterparts in the religious persons of Zarathustra, Moses, the Buddha, Mahaveera, Confucius, Lao Tsu, Krsna, the Prophet of Islam, Guru Nanak, Bahá'u'lláh and many other sages and spiritual animators.

Lastly, the people of other convictions with no definitive religious tradition can ascertain why these spiritual figures remain central to different life styles and the interests of various people. They could also compare notes as to how their own varying convictions might synchronize or remain contrary to those of the sages and what they think of them in their own non-religious world, because some of them refuse to be religious, yet claim that they are spiritual. What does it mean to be spiritual without being religious is also an interesting discussion that has been with us for sometime now.

A CONCLUDING STROKE

Jesus the Jew in this essay attempted to explore in the context of the strict monotheism of his Jewishness, yet countered by the divinized Augustus Caesar. Jesus' response to the empire and his own religious elite that disowned him is remarkable with his life witness. This paper argues that to place Jesus in the context of other religious figures of history indicates that monotheism remains a significant pursuit of humanity, yet non-theism and other convictions have also nourished the human pursuit of happiness and meaning. Humans have found many ways to seek happiness and fulfillment and religions remain significant means while others have found different convictions to fulfill their objectives in life. So Jesus as a young man, with his alternative view and way of life within his Jewish tradition,

fact could be considered an extension of '*A Common Word between Us and You*', an open letter dated 13 October 2007, from leaders of the Islamic world from most different schools of thought to their counterparts in the global Christian traditions. Both remain global attempts to promote Christian-Muslim relations.

promoted the view that the 'love ethic' was a far better option than any abiding 'law suits'. Although law suits may be necessary from time to time, he taught that without love all would end in misery and unhappiness. For Jesus, the joy of life was rooted in the Abba relationship and the love of others and the world. His radical compassion flowed from this unique way of relating - and this was surely what was distinct in the life of Jesus (*Isa*), presenting a life-paradigm central to the history of religious thought.

ISLAM AND THE PERSON: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DEBATES¹

Peter G. Riddell

INTRODUCTION:

The histories of both Christianity and Islam have been marked by great debates. Often the debates within the two faiths have concerned similar topics and have been based on similar arguments. A recurring topic in both faiths has related to the concept of personhood: what it means to be human and the nature of the relationship between the individual person and God.

In this paper we will place a particular focus upon the discussion of the nature of person within Islam. We will especially consider approaches taken by Muslim scholars who were on the one hand inclined to literal interpretations of the Qur'an and, on the other, those inclined to reason-based interpretations of Islam's sacred text.²

Scholars inclined to literalism are best represented by the '*ulama*', usually formally trained in religious schools who influence religious decision-making processes, legal committees and so forth. Also relevant to this category are the radical revivalist groups, who are often not formally trained in the Islamic educational system.

By contrast, scholars inclined to reason-based interpretations of the Qur'an are sometimes formally trained in Islamic educational systems but express more liberal approaches in addressing the challenges of today.

This article will first consider how different streams of Islamic thinkers, drawn from across the centuries to give a sense of the breadth of debate among Muslims, have addressed key topics of relevance to the question of

¹. This article represents a summary of a more substantial study of this topic that will be published in 2021.

². This division reflects the great debate between the *Mu'tazila* and the *Ahl al-Hadith* in the 8th century.

what it means to be human: the purpose of creation of humans; the nature of humans; guidance versus free will; human freedom to question; the individual's relationship with God and society and so forth. The article will then address two issues of contemporary debate – contraception and abortion – and how these issues speak Islamic perspectives on the concept of person.

COMMON TERMINOLOGY FOR PERSON IN THE QUR'AN

A range of terms is used in Arabic in the Qur'an and associated literature to express the concept of person. On occasions the concept is expressed by the term *al-nas*; most commonly 'person/people' in English translation is used to render *nafs/anfus*; occasionally 'person/people' is used to render *rajul/rijal*. Penrice's 'Dictionary of the Qur'an' explains *nafs* as 'A soul, a living soul or person'³ as seen in the following verses:

Q. 6:98 It is He Who hath produced you from a single person (*nafsin wahidatin*); here is a place of sojourn and a place of departure: We detail Our Signs for people who understand. Some verses use *nafs* to refer specifically to the physical person:

Q. 12:54 So the king said: 'Bring him unto me; I will take him specially to serve about my own person (*nafsi*). While a more inner notion of 'soul' is prominent within *nafs/anfus* in the following verse:

Q. 6:93... If thou couldst but see how the wicked (do fare) in the flood of confusion at death! The angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), 'Yield up your souls (*anfusakum*): this day shall ye receive your reward, a penalty of shame, for that ye used to tell lies against Allah, and scornfully to reject of His Signs!'

VIEWS OF THE LITERALISTS

We could begin our discussion with an important question: 'What makes a person whole?' For the literalists, the answer was to be found in a person fulfilling his God-given duties.

³. J. Penrice, *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran*, London, 1873, 149.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CREATION OF MAN

The 20th century Islamist writer Gamal al-Banna (1920-2013) argues that man's primary purpose in Islam derives from being *khalifa* (vice-gerent) 'who has to relate to this earth on behalf of God, and in accordance with his guidance and values, not just by pursuing personal interest.'⁴ Al-Banna points to Qur'anic verses which say that man was created for a specific purpose by God:

Q. 51:56. I have only created *jinn* and men (*ins*), that they may serve Me.

Q. 51:57. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me.

Though al-Banna speaks of relationship, in his view man's relating to God is one of unquestioning subservience.

THE NATURE OF MAN

The nature of the *nafs* means that guidance is needed for a person to be able to fulfil his God-given purpose of service. The great exegete al-Tabari (d. 923), a champion of the literalist stream of interpretation,⁵ argues for three main states of *nafs* in his commentary on *Surah*¹² verse 53, which states 'the soul is certainly prone to evil'.

First is the '*nafs al-ammara bi al-su'*, 'the soul which commands towards evil'. This is the soul, which inclines its owner to every wrong or evil deed. The second state of soul is the *nafs al-lawwama*, 'the soul that blames'. This refers to the soul, which is aware of its own imperfections. The third state of soul is the *nafs al-mutma'inna* (the soul at peace). Al-Tabari, citing the follower Qatada b. Di'amah (d. 735) from Basra, describes this soul in the following terms: 'It is the soul of the believer, made calm by what Allah has

⁴ M. Baraka, "Islam and Development from the perspective of an Islamic thinker and a labour unionist: Gamal al-Banna", *Islamic Quarterly*, XXVIII/4 (1984), 208.

⁵ Although al-Tabari reported different interpretations of the Qur'anic text by drawing on the first three centuries of scholars, his approach was essentially literalist in his heavy dependence on Hadith reports, in contrast with the much more philosophical and rationalist approaches of later exegetes such as al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi.

promised. Its owner is at rest and content with his knowledge of Allah's Names and Attributes, and with what He has said about Himself and His Messenger (*pbuh*), and with what He has said about what awaits the soul after death: about the departure of the soul, the life in the *Barzakh*, and the events of the Day of *Qiyamah* which will follow. So much so that a believer such as this can almost see them with his own eyes. So he submits to the will of Allah and surrenders to Him contentedly, never dissatisfied or complaining, and with his faith never wavering. He does not rejoice at his gains, nor do his afflictions make him despair - for he knows that they were decreed long before they happened to him, even before he was created....'⁶

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), one of the greatest scholarly writers on *nafs*, stressed that the above did not reflect three independent entities. Rather they were states which could change from one to the other, aiming for the *nafs al-mutma'inna* as a final 'aim of perfection...'⁷ In order for this to occur, a person needed to serve God as laid down in the scriptures, which were revealed through the prophets.

GUIDANCE IS PROVIDED

Though separated from Ibn Qayyim by many centuries, the prominent 20th century Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) reminds us of the enduring relevance to many Muslims of literalist exegesis. He comments upon Chapter 114 of the Qur'an, stressing each person's responsibility to follow the guidance given him, and the calamitous result of not doing so. Though the agent of evil seems formidable, it is easy for a person to ward off his temptations, simply by seeking refuge with God:

'Though [Allah] has permitted Satan to attack, He has supreme power over him and He has also provided guidance for man. Allah leaves to Satan only those who neglect Him their Lord, Sovereign and Deity, but those who live

6. Al-Tabari: *Jami' al-Bayan an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, vol. 13, Bulaq 1323/1905, cited in A. Afifi al-Akiti, "The Meaning of Nafs", <https://www.ummah.com/forum/forum/library/islamic-lectures-reminders/491030-the-meaning-of-nafs>, copied 20 July 2019.

7. *Madarij as-Şalikin fi Manazili Iyyaka Na'budu wa Iyyaka Nasta'in*, vol. 1, 308, cited in al-Akiti, "Meaning".

in consciousness of Him are safe and protected against his intimidations and incitements.’⁸

DEBATES ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD

Such contemporary thinkers as al-Banna and Qutb looked for inspiration to the medieval literalist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who claimed that ‘man’s purpose is not to know [God], but to obey Him.’⁹ Ibn Taymiyya had little time for Islamic philosophers who argued that human reasoning could uncover eternal truths about God.¹⁰ Abul A`la Mawdudi (d. 1979) writes: ‘the sphere of human perceptions as against the vastness of this great universe is not even comparable to a drop of water as against the ocean.’¹¹ Some questions seemed to be taboo, according to the literalists. A much-debated example was whether God’s attributes were integral to His essence (*dhat*) or were additional to it. The Patani Malay scholar Dawud al-Fatani (d. 1847) draws on the Egyptian Shafi’i scholar Muhammad al-Suhaymi (d. 1764) in writing as follows:

‘It is not required... to discuss the attributes [of God] and their relations, whether they are the *dhat* or not. In fact, the Companions of the Prophet and their followers themselves abstained from addressing such issues. [Indeed they] forbade discussion of them. It is better and much safer for us not to discuss something which is beyond our intellectual ability.’¹²

Thus in the view of the literalists, a person is a created human being, distinguishable from Allah in every significant respect, created not to wonder why but rather to serve Allah and to follow His guidance as contained in the sacred Scripture and the revealed Law. A person becomes whole by serving Allah and following His guidance.

⁸. Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an* Vol. 30, London, 1979, 366

⁹. J. A. Williams, *Islam*, London, 1961, 206.

¹⁰. Williams, *Islam*, 209-10.

¹¹. Abul-A`la Mawdudi, *The Meaning of the Qur’an*, commentary on *Surah 72*, http://www.unn.ac.uk/societies/islamic/quran/intro/i072.htm#H_072_3

¹². *Al-Durr al-Thamin*, cited in M. F. Bin Abdul Mukti, *The Development of Kalam in the Malay World: The Teaching of Shaykh Dawud al-Fatani on the Attributes of God*, PhD dissertation, Univ. of Birmingham, 2001, 148.

VIEWS OF THE REASON-BASED SCHOLARS

How do reason-based scholars answer the question: 'What makes a person whole?' Al-Hasan al-Basri (642-728) was an early rationalist thinker who agreed essentially with the earlier-stated view of the purpose for mankind's creation. He commented '[God] ordered them to worship Him which is why He created them.' He nevertheless allowed the individual person a considerable measure of free will, presenting reason-based arguments as follows: 'God would not have created them for a purpose and then come between them and (the purpose) because He does not do harm to His servants.'¹³

THE INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND SOCIETY

The Indonesian theologian Jalaluddin Rakhmat adds another dimension to the rationalist quest: 'All Muslims feel that Islam is not just about regulating the relationship between mankind and God. All groups agree, both fundamentalists and liberals, that in our religion there must be a relationship between the individual and God, but one must still be cognizant that one is part of a society. What then becomes a challenge is to formulate our position in the midst of that society.'¹⁴

GOD IS TRANSCENDENT

Views emphasizing a relationship between the individual and God such as articulated by Jalaluddin Rakhmat might run the risk of reducing God in his majestic transcendence. The modern Muslim academic Professor Mahmoud Abu-Saud seems to anticipate and address this in the following reason-based approach to transcendence:

'(a) God, the sole Creator of all beings, the Lord and the Owner of everything, the Absolute and the Ultimate; (b) the human community as an

¹³. Cited in A. Rippin & J. Knappert, *Textual sources for the Study of Islam*, Chicago, 1986, 116.

¹⁴. Jalaluddin Rakhmat, "Tentang Syariat, Islam Fundamentalis dan Liberal", *Tempo Interaktif*, 11 December 2000.

entity integrated in the cosmos; (c) the human individual who is ordained to be responsible for himself, his collectivity and his environment; (d) Man is made of matter and spirit. He attains cognition by means of the logistics of his meditative faculty and the awareness of his spirituality; (e) the revealed standard of values, commandments and basic criteria which regulate, govern and guide human behaviour.’¹⁵

Abu-Saud’s final point emphasizes guidance and acts as a brake on the risk of overstating human freedom. Abu-Saud expands God’s purposes in creating man beyond the simple idea of creating man for worship. He argues that the first purpose is indeed to worship God. The second is to represent God in the guardianship over the creation; man is selected for this role rather than any other creature as only man has the required faculties. Finally, man is created ‘to cause growth on earth and make it more resourceful for his own benefit, welfare and prosperity.’¹⁶

ISLAMIC RESPONSES TO TWO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

We will conclude with a consideration of two topics of contemporary debate, which pertain to the issue of the concept of person.

a) Contraception: Prevention of a Person

Muslims no less than Christians have been challenged by certain ethical issues which involve human medical intervention in domains traditionally seen as the preserve of God. Muslim scholars and thinkers are facing increasing questions such as ‘should human beings interfere via contraception with the God-given process which creates life?’ Some conservative Muslim theologians and groups who lean towards literalism question contraception, citing Qur’anic verses such as:

¹⁵. Mahmoud Abu-Saud, “Economics Within Transcendence”, *Islamica* vol. 1, no. 2 (March 1993), 6

¹⁶. Abu-Saud, “Economics”, 6

Q. 11:6 "There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependeth on Allah."¹⁷

Their concerns are several. First, by practicing uncontrolled contraception, humans may be seen to be derogating the role of God. Second, as suggested in somewhat conspiratorial terms by the British Islamist group *Al-Muhajiroun*: 'the idea of birth control propagated [sic] nowadays stretches far back to a historical and an ideological conspiracy which the disbelievers concocted against the Muslims for fear of the rapid demographic growth of the Islamic *Ummah*, which was threatening their objectives, their areas of influence and their interests... Indeed the growing birthrate of the Muslims does not only concern the Jews, but the whole world, for their proliferation would make them a major force.'¹⁸

Abu Fadl Mohsin Ebrahim,¹⁹ who belongs broadly within the camp of the literalists, is willing to exercise some flexibility on the question of contraceptive use, writing as follows:

'...where pregnancy may injure the health of the woman or may even threaten her life, the higher purpose of protecting life... would prevail, requiring a woman to make use of contraceptive devices to protect her health or life.'

His next statement points us clearly in the direction of his primary points of reference and suggests a measure of discomfort which he feels regarding contraceptive use: 'The use of contraceptive devices for other reasons by mutual consent between the husband and wife is *makruh* (undesirable, improper)... but not necessarily *haram* (forbidden) under the *shari'ah*.'²⁰

¹⁷. Cf. the Islamist group *Al-Muhajiroun*'s statement "Islamic Verdict on Contraception", <http://www.almuhajiroun.com/Islamic%20Topics/Islamic%20Fiqh/Contraception.htm>, copied January 2003. Reproduced at <https://www.facebook.com/Shariah4Mauritius/posts/2002265896722278>, copied 17 August 2019.

¹⁸. *Al-Muhajiroun*: "Islamic Verdict on Contraception"

¹⁹. This scholar took his PhD under Isma'il al-Faruqi at Temple University and teaches at the University of Durban Westville, South Africa.

²⁰. Abu Fadl Mohsin Ebrahim, *Abortion, Birth Control and Surrogate Parenting: An Islamic Perspective*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publications, 1989, 102

With the increasing availability of birth control methods, questions about the acceptability of using contraception are increasingly evident in online fatwa sites. For example, the fatwa site of *Darul Ifta, Darul Uloom Deoband*, received the following question:²¹ “I am a medical student. I am planning to *nikah* next year with a girl who is completing her education. At the time of *nikah*... two years will be left [for her studies] & after that she will come to live with me ... my question is can we meet & do sex during these two years?”. The response from this conservative group was quite curt: “(1) Yes, you can meet and have sexual relation after *nikah*. (2) It is against the will of *Shari’ah* to use contraceptive method without exigent need.”²²

The *Darul Fiqh* online platform, launched in 2011 by British trained scholar Mufti Faraz Adam, would similarly be considered as leaning towards literalism. On the question of whether contraception is permissible in Islam, Mufti Adam argues for two macro-types of contraception: irreversible contraception (vasectomy and hysterectomy) and reversible contraception (barrier methods and hormonal methods). He argues that the former is almost always unacceptable under *Shari’ah* Law, whereas the latter is acceptable under certain circumstances: health issues, while travelling, impending divorce and so forth.²³

Reason-based scholars, however, are more relaxed about contraceptive use. Fazlur Rahman ridicules as “infantile” the use of Qur’anic references to God’s power and promise such as Q. 11:6 above: “The Qur’an certainly does not mean to say that God provides every living creature with sustenance whether that creature is capable of procuring sustenance for itself or not.”²⁴ Abdulaziz Sachedina²⁵ prescribes only the broadest of limits

²¹ Edited for improved English style

²² Fatwa: 1695/1387/D=1430, <http://www.darulifta-deoband.com/home/en/qa/16023>, copied 17 August 2019

²³ Mufti Faraz Adam, “Is contraception permissible in Islam?”, 2012, <http://darulfiqh.com/is-contraception-permissible-in-islam/>, copied 17 August 2019

²⁴ “The Right To Contraception And Abortion In Ten World Religions”, http://www.religiousconsultation.org/islam_contraception_abortion_in_SacredChoices.htm, copied January 2003

in affirming that ‘birth control is... permissible if the prescribed method does not have any adverse impact on the health of either spouse and if it does not lead to permanent sterilization.’²⁶

Nevertheless, at the macro level, both literalists and reason-based scholars are broadly in agreement on the issue of accepting a measure of contraceptive use, though more conservative scholars impose stricter limits. Above all, there is no suggestion that contraceptive use is a matter of personal choice which individuals can take on the basis of considerations of pleasure and sexual fulfillment, especially outside wedlock, as is widespread in the West.

b) Abortion: Termination of a Person

What about the thorny issue of terminating life, especially abortion, which is such a controversial topic in the West? The literalists point to Scripture in seeking a solution. Abu Fadl Mohsin Ebrahim reminds his audience that ‘Analysis of the ethical issues in bio-medical technology should be derived from the guidance of Allah, Who alone has absolute knowledge of good and bad.’²⁷

Medical specialist Shahid Athar (1945-2018)²⁸ points to several Islamic verses as suggesting a prohibition on abortion:

Q. 17:31 Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.

²⁵. A Tanzanian-born American citizen who is a Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia

²⁶. Abdulaziz Sachedina, “Muslim Beliefs and Practices Affecting Health Care”, <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~aas/issues/care.htm>

²⁷. Ebrahim, *Abortion*, 101

²⁸. Born in India and educated at the University of Karachi, Pakistan, Dr Athar specialised in endocrinology in the USA and served as Clinical Associate Professor at Indiana University School of Medicine. He authored seven books and many published articles on medical and Islamic topics.

However, in unpacking the issue, Athar concludes that where the mother's life is in danger, abortion is acceptable as a last resort. Under any other circumstances, says Athar, abortion of a viable fetus is equivalent to infanticide.²⁹

Nevertheless, Muslim scholars debate this issue at length. Islamic Law schools differ in the rigidity and flexibility of their interpretations. The Hanafi School of law takes the most liberal approach, allowing the woman the right to abort under certain circumstances without her husband's consent, while the Maliki school of law prohibits abortion under all circumstances. Ja'fari (*Shi'i*) jurists tend to take a middle position. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, abortion was made illegal, though a decade later it was permitted under strict conditions, where the mother's life was in danger or where the fetus was abnormal.³⁰

The General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments (*Awqaf*) of the United Arab Emirates has been offering call-in fatwa advice in English³¹ since late 2010 and in Arabic³² since several years earlier.³³ In late 2016 the service employed fifty religious scholars, including three women, to issue fatwas to callers. One caller explained that she had previously had two stillborn babies and was pregnant again. Her doctor indicated that the fetus was experiencing severe complications and was likely to die. The woman asked whether Islam would permit her to have an abortion. One of the female religious scholars employed by the *awqaf* service, Moroccan scholar Sheikha Naeema, advised the woman as follows, suggesting strict limits on circumstances when abortion is acceptable: "If the fetus is severely ill and will not survive, you may have an abortion... You must take advice from

²⁹ Shahid Athar, "The Islamic Perspective in Medical Ethics", in Shahid Athar (ed.), *Islamic Perspectives in Medicine*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publications, 1993, p. 190.

³⁰ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, London, Tauris, 1999, pp. 39, 41.

³¹ <https://www.awqaf.gov.ae/en/Pages/Default.aspx>, copied 18 August 2019

³² <https://www.awqaf.gov.ae/ar/Pages/default.aspx>, copied 18 August 2019

³³ Anwar Ahmad, "Awqaf's online fatwa service also on its English website", *Khaleej Times*, January 11, 2011, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/general/awqaf-s-online-fatwa-service-also-on-its-english-website>

your physician - he will guide you. Religion does not conflict with medicine.”³⁴

The reason-based thinker Abdulaziz Sachedina allows a greater measure of flexibility, commenting as follows: ‘Abortion is permitted where the mother's health is in imminent danger. In addition, before the fetus attains personhood, that is, during the first hundred and twenty days, abortion is permissible if the woman would stop lactating for another child. Rape is also a valid reason for abortion if there is a fear of psychological damage and problems that could lead to physical symptoms.’³⁵

Nevertheless, there is no clear divide between literalist and reason-based scholars on this issue as Muslim scholars are still reflecting on the question of abortion though the strong tendency is towards clear restrictions. In no case is there a prominent group of Islamic thinkers who argue for abortion on demand. Both literalists and the more reason-based theologians would see such a policy as hijacking what rightfully belongs in the domain of God; i.e. the creation and sustaining of human life.

CONCLUSION

In discussing the concept of person in Islam, we might ask whether we should start with human beings or with God. The literalists would respond that of course we must start with God as all things start with God, and indeed, the question itself should not even be posed. Mankind might be the ‘crown of creation’, but the ultimate authority of God is beyond question: ‘... every human being has the right to be born, the right to be, and the right to live as long as Allah... permits.’³⁶

In answer to the question ‘What makes a person whole?’, Muslims of various ideological persuasions would probably state that wholeness is

³⁴. Hamida Ghafour, “The fatwa hotline: ‘We have heard everything’”, *The Guardian*, 20 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/20/heard-everything-women-fatwa-hotline-abu-dhabi>, copied 18 August 2019

³⁵. Abdulaziz Sachedina, “Muslim Beliefs and Practices Affecting Health Care”, <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~aas/issues/care.htm>

³⁶. Ebrahim, *Abortion*, 102

achieved by following the revealed Scripture and Law, not by engaging in navel-gazing. The focus should be on God, not people.

In response to a quest to define 'personhood', a technical answer from within Islam might be as follows: 'Islam holds that Man consists of two essential elements, one material which is the body, the other spiritual which is the soul (*nafs*). Life exists in the human body as long as the soul is joined to it, and it ceases when the soul departs from the body.'³⁷

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THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: RELIGION AS A SUBJECT OF INQUIRY

Herman Roborgh

ABSTRACT:

The initial enthusiasm for the scientific study of religion and other religions (also known as comparative religion) during the 19th century almost evaporated during the 20th century for two reasons. Firstly, it became clear that scholars of comparative religion had allowed presuppositions and assumptions to influence their research. Secondly, the horrors of the world wars disproved the scientific theory regarding the gradual evolution of religions. Eventually, two groups of scholars of comparative religion emerged. One group wanted to continue their research using the scientific method. The other group felt that comparative religion should make a more significant contribution to society. This article concludes that, firstly, scholars of religion must remain wary of the presuppositions and subjective bias they bring to the study of religion. Secondly, scholars of religion could abandon the exclusivist approach to the truth of other religions so as to foster a deeper engagement among religions in the modern world.

ENTHUSIASM FOR THE METHOD OF SCIENCE

In the 19th century, many scholars were quite confident that comparative religion would flourish by adopting the scientific method. For example, in 1873, Max Muller, whom many consider to be the father of the modern discipline called comparative religion, had this to say: "A Science of Religion, based on an impartial and truly scientific comparison of all, or at all events, of the most important, religions of mankind, is now only a question of time."¹

The scientific approach to comparative religion became popular during the closing years of the 19th century. The general feeling (at least in America)

¹. Max Muller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, quoted in Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion A History*, London: Duckworth, 1975, Preface, p. xi.

was that history was the key to the scientific study of other religions and that science was neutral in any conflict between the religions.²

However, Sharpe (writing in 1970) held that scholars since the 19th century have abandoned the scientific approach to the study of religion and “no new method accepted by all has arisen to take its place.”³ At the end of his one hundred year survey (1870 to 1970) of the method of comparative religion, Sharpe concludes that methodology had become the key issue for comparative religion.

For many years now the question of method has been wide open, and despite the high seriousness which has always been found in the study of religion, the scholarly community has not always been able to agree on the terms or conditions on which that study ought to be pursued.⁴ Serious questions about the suitability of the scientific method to study religion began to surface during the 20th century and resulted in a loss of confidence in the approach of comparative religion. Philosophers, theologians and social scientists who formerly were fascinated by the comparative approach to the study of world religions have begun to question the validity of such an approach.⁵ Some of these scholars even began to doubt that comparative religion was an academic discipline at all.

Eventually, four main views about the aim and method of comparative religion emerged. First, one group of scholars were of the view that the scientific study of religion should search for the objective truth underlying all the religions (the so-called ‘commonalities’) so as to discover the essence of religion or the absolute truth transcending all the religions. According to the second group of scholars, comparative religion should dispense with all presuppositions and value judgments and study the religions based on information provided by other academic disciplines. A third group of scholars were of the view that comparative religion should allow the

². Mircea Eliade and J.M. Kitagawa (ed.), *The History of Religions; Essays in Methodology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959, p. 5

³. *ibid*, p. xii

⁴. *ibid*, p. 268

⁵. Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 5

followers of the different religions to speak for themselves about their own religious experience. A fourth group of scholars claimed that comparative religion should be studied from the perspective of one's own religion and that theology should clarify the topics chosen for study.⁶ This last group of scholars implied that the study of other religions 'from within' would follow certain methods of theological reflection.

The differences among scholars about the correct method for the scientific study of religion is reflected in the diversity of names by which this discipline has come to be known, namely, general science of religions (German: *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft*), comparative religion, history of religions, phenomenology of religion, religious studies etc.⁷

This paper will discuss various scholarly approaches to the study of religion and conclude that today the subject of comparative religion has become like an elephant in the room. The reason is that the scientific approach to comparative religion has not been able to dismiss the impression of subjectivity and prejudice in the study of religion and the religions. In fact, the Enlightenment use of reason has led to more confusion than clarity about a rational and objective approach to the study of religion.

THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION

Ever since the Age of Reason or the Enlightenment (17th to 18th centuries), comparative religion has placed the religions side by side in order to study them in a systematic way. According to Mircea Eliade (1907-86), "The thinkers of the Enlightenment attempted to find the meaning of religion in terms of 'reason,' rather than depending solely on revelation."⁸ Their aim was to find the essence of religion by discovering the existence of patterns among the religions of the world. Some scholars of comparative religion

6. cf. *ibid*, pp. 6-7

7. Max Muller first used the term *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft* in 1867. "In the English-speaking world, the imposing title of 'general science of religions' has not been used widely, partly because it is too long and awkward, and partly because the English word 'science' tends to be misleading." *Ibid*, p. 15

8. *ibid*, p. 17

chose to study the history of religion and others focused on the signs and symbols of the religions. Some scholars were more interested in the rituals or the teachings of the religions while others focused on religious beliefs and practices. The general assumption was that scholars were able to classify each of these subjects according to a definite order and arrangement, thereby articulating the similarities and the differences that existed between the religions.

The subject and the focus for research were determined by the subjective judgment of scholars. Their goal was to identify features that many or all of the religions had in common. The assumption that all religions contained a common essence and followed a similar pattern or system enabled comparative scholars to identify the commonalities among them. However, by trying to fit the rituals, doctrines, beliefs and practices of all religions into a generally acceptable philosophical framework, scholars of comparative religion were accused of reductionism.

At first, comparative religion seemed to be a scientific study of religion because scholars were drawing their conclusions from empirical data and objective analysis. In the course of time, however, it became clear that the method of comparative religion was subject to the assumptions, presuppositions and bias of the researchers. For example, many of the pioneers in the field of comparative religion had definite ideas about the so-called essence of each religion, such as its concepts of deity, of the nature and destiny of man and of the world, which have been handed down to us through manuals and handbooks that are abundant in the European tradition of *Religionswissenschaft*.⁹

Another cause for concern was the precise limits of the field that could be investigated by comparative religion. Many scholars developed the view that comparative religion should refrain from evaluating the truth-value of other religions because the assessment of religious beliefs and doctrines should be done within the religious traditions to which they belonged.

⁹. *ibid*, p. 26

Moreover, whenever comparative religion became involved in a discussion of the truth-value of beliefs and doctrines, it entered the field reserved for theology. But the boundaries between comparative religion and theology were not clearly defined. For instance, some scholars of comparative religion had no hesitation in dividing the religions into two categories: those religions that were revealed and those that were not revealed. However, such a division is based on preconceptions about the nature of revelation and exposes an implicit theological judgment.

In short, the scientific study of religion that developed in the West was inspired by the rationality of Enlightenment thinkers, who urged scholars of comparative religion to discover the essence of religion. Moreover, Enlightenment sciences provided scholars of comparative religion with useful material, such as the findings history, archaeology, philology, anthropology, psychology, sociology and so on. Scholars of religion from the East, however, were not so ready to reduce religious experience to rational concepts. Many scholars of comparative religion today have become aware of the need to look beyond the rationalism of the positive sciences and to search for new perspectives for the study of the religions.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW METHOD

The publication of Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species* in 1869 caused confusion among religious people because Darwin adopted the scientific method to explain the origin of different species of life on earth. He developed a theory of evolution based on what he considered to be scientific evidence. Sharpe explains that this evidence was based on a method that was truly scientific because of its inductive pattern and its belief in universal laws of cause and effect, and because of its distrust of obvious a priori arguments; critical because of its fundamental attitude to evidence; historical because of the new sense of continuity between the past and the present to which it gave rise; comparative because it claimed comparison to be the basis of all knowledge.¹⁰

¹⁰. Sharpe, op. cit., p. 31

After Darwin had demonstrated that the scientific method could be used to discuss realities that previously had belonged exclusively to the domain of religion such as the origin of humanity, the discipline of comparative religion began to adopt an evolutionary approach to the study of religions by classifying the beliefs and practices of the religions according to the pattern of evolution. This new approach to comparative religion led scholars to search for convincing evidence for their assumption that primitive religions had developed from very simple forms of religious expression to increasingly complex patterns and structures.

After the trauma of the war years, however, theories about the unilinear evolution of religion began to lose favour because the horror of the wars had shown that human society was not developing according to linear evolutionary patterns. Scholars began to realize that the findings of comparative religion that had been taken as evidence for the theory of evolutionary development of the religions of humanity had arisen out of a value judgment about which religious expression was considered to be higher or more developed than another. Eventually, the practice of comparing primitive religions with more advanced forms of religion was rejected as baseless.

Furthermore, after the war years, scholars of comparative religion became aware that they had been reducing the study of religion to abstractions. They discovered that their discussions of abstract concepts were separating the scholar of religion from those who actually practiced these religions (*homo religiosus*). So they began to search for an approach that would be more sensitive to the religious experience of the human person. As Sharpe observes:

“When the attempt is made to study religion solely on the basis of logical and social categories, the whole enterprise so often moves in the sphere of abstractions, revealing nothing of the mind of *homo religiosus*, and failing at

any point seriously to make contact with the personality of the researcher.”¹¹

Scholars of comparative religion became aware that religions were always based on experience rather than on rational concepts and they began to wonder whether it was possible to understand another religion totally and adequately. As a result, the focus of comparative religion began to shift away from an interest in rational accounts of rites and doctrines and to focus more on accurate descriptions of religious experience. For instance, Mircea Eliade draws the following conclusion from his research into women’s initiation: “It is easy to discern a common element: the foundation for all these rites and mysteries is always a deep religious experience . . . The mystery of childbearing, that is, woman’s discovery that she is a creator on the plane of life, constitutes a religious experience that cannot be translated into masculine terms.”¹²

Scholars of comparative religion became convinced that religions have no existence apart from their existential existence within human societies, and they began to take the religious experience of human beings more seriously. As Eliade writes “A purely rational man is an abstraction; he is never found in real life. Every human being is made up at once of his conscious activity and his irrational experiences.”¹³

Instead of trying to develop theories and conclusions from written texts, scholars of comparative religion started living among the people so they could participate in the religious experience of the people. Bennett notes that the emphasis on experience caused another shift in the development of comparative religion.

“Thus, there are Muslims, Buddhists and Christians rather than Islam, Buddhism and Christianity and . . . The study of religions becomes the study of religious persons, acts and behavior . . . Again, this suggests new

¹¹. *ibid*, p. 235

¹². Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961, p. 193-94

¹³. *ibid*, p. 209

subject matter for the student of religions. Old interest in doctrines and in scriptures begins to give way to a new interest in worship, ritual, liturgy, religious art and symbolism as well as in how faith is 'acted out' (as verb) in society."¹⁴

In a similar vein, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), who taught for eight years at Forman Christian College, Lahore, held that the term religion was no longer useful as a subject of study because it had been made to refer to an object, a thing, which is devoid of persons and transcendence. In Smith's view, faith experience should be the focus of inquiry for those interested in comparative religion.

"By faith I mean personal faith . . . an inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person; the impingement upon him of the transcendent, putative or real."¹⁵ Smith criticized scholars of religion who did not enter into the religious experience of others but were content to observe them from the outside. Such scholars were like "flies crawling on the surface of a goldfish bowl, making accurate and complete observations on the fish inside . . . and indeed contributing much to our knowledge of the subject; but never asking themselves, and never finding out, how it feels to be a goldfish."

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

In the first half of the 20th century, Van der Leeuw ((1890-1950) developed a method, which became known as the phenomenology of religion. This method drew inspiration from the philosophical phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who wanted to get back to 'things' as they appeared in reality, that is, the phenomena, 'in themselves'. Husserl thought that it was necessary to become free of the preconceived theories and interpretive frameworks into which scholars had tried to fit the data of their research.

¹⁴. Clinton Bennett, *In Search of the Sacred: Anthropology and the Study of Religions*, London: Cassell, 1996, p. 107

¹⁵. Smith W.C., *The Meaning and End of Religion*, New York: New American Library, 1964, p. 141

In his view, scholars should suspend their judgment and their involvement in the experience of research by a process he called *epoche*, the 'bracketing out' of their own emotions, theories, ideas, assumptions, values and presuppositions so as to allow the phenomena to appear as they are. He wrote: "Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals, and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they 'appear.' For this reason, they are called 'phenomena,' and their most general essential character is to exist as the 'consciousness-of' or 'appearance-of' the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth."¹⁶

Van der Leeuw applied this method to comparative religion. In his view, comparative religion does not need to analyze various 'things' or 'concepts' about religion in an abstract way but simply to study the 'phenomena' that appear in the consciousness of the observer. Phenomenology is neither metaphysics nor the effort to comprehend empirical reality. Phenomenologists of religion, therefore, do not enter into a discussion of truth claims, nor are they concerned with the origin and development of religion but they simply observe the phenomena as these appear in their consciousness.

Eliade was a phenomenologist of religion who became interested in studying other religions not from the "outside" but from the "inside." He wrote: "To come to know the mental universe of *homo religiosus*, we must above all take into account the men of these primitive societies. Now, to us in this day their culture seems eccentric if not positively aberrant; in any case it is difficult to grasp. But there is no other way of understanding a

¹⁶. Quoted in Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics, Development and Significance*, London, SCM Press, 2002, p. 58

foreign mental universe than to place oneself inside it, at its every center, in order to progress from there to all the values that it possesses.”¹⁷

The phenomenology of religion approximates the scientific method in that it urges researchers to dispense with their own values and judgments regarding the data of religion. Further, the phenomenological approach claims to be scientific by making a distinction between describing another religion and interpreting its meaning.

“The phenomenologists of religion also distinguish the collection and description of religious data, which is objective and scientific, from the interpretation of meaning, which is at least partially subjective and normative.”¹⁸

Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) adopted the phenomenological approach in his study of the numinous quality of religious experience as a unique a priori category of meaning and value, which should not be reduced to its moral or rational or conceptual aspects. A religious experience of “the holy” cannot be defined or conceptualized. The experience of the “wholly other” is qualitatively unique and transcendent. The student of comparative religion must not reduce religious experience into a rationalistic discourse in the attempt to interpret or to understand it according to the concepts of history, sociology, psychology etc. Phenomenologists of religion have generally accepted this emphasis on the autonomy of religion and have simply observed and investigated the unique manifestations or phenomena of religion. According to Wayne Proudfoot (b. 1939), an American scholar of religion: “No topic is better suited for an examination of current issues in religious thought and the study of religion than religious experience. If we can understand how that experience has been variously described, and

¹⁷. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, New York: Harper Torchbook edition, 1961, p. 165

¹⁸. Douglas Allen, “Phenomenology of Religion” in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1987, vol. 3, p. 281

begin to distinguish between descriptive, analytical, explanatory, and evocative elements in the accounts of religious experience which have been most influential, we will be in a better position to assess the current state of the field.”¹⁹

Another scholar of religion who demonstrated the use of the phenomenological approach was Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), who maintained that religions “manifest themselves in signs and symbols which, as far as believers are concerned, express the way the world actually is.”²⁰ Signs and symbols are to be understood, not merely as expressions of social identity but as meaningful in and of themselves. Signs and symbols are the visible manifestations of religion in the world. They can be studied within their own social and religious context, free of the presuppositions of the scholar of religion.

Both Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) were sociologists who wrote about the structures and patterns underpinning all religions. Similarly, for Mircea Eliade, the author of *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, the purpose of comparative religion was to identify the patterns in the hierophanies (structures which manifest the sacred), symbols and archetypes of human societies. However, Bennett explains that phenomenology should discourage comparison, “since to talk about different phenomena as if they were the same phenomena may do an injustice to the actuality, or essence of each different phenomena.”²¹ For instance, it is misleading to compare the Qur’an and the Bible because Muslims and Christians regard these scriptures differently. Since each religion is unique, the religions cannot be reduced to a theory or essence that they share in common. This means that there is no such thing as a typology or structure that would apply to all the religions.

¹⁹. Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, Introduction, xv

²⁰. Bennett, op. cit., p. 103

²¹. Bennett, op. cit., p. 104

In short, phenomenologists of religion regarded religious traditions as autonomous and independent entities and did not feel the need to draw general conclusions or to develop explanatory theories or frameworks that would include all of these traditions. Phenomenology was the method they adopted to avoid imposing alien concepts and words on the phenomena, the signs and symbols of religion.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

One of the issues raised by the critics of phenomenology was that the phenomenological approach discussed religious phenomena as if they could be separated from their historical context. For instance, scholars criticized Eliade for taking myths and symbols out of their historical context.

“Eliade’s main ‘historical documents’ are non-written religious expressions such as myths and symbols, which stretch back in appearance far beyond the time when they are first discovered or documented; his concern is with typologies rather than historical contexts and narratives; his interest is in the structure of hierophanies and archetypal symbols rather than in the way individuals or groups interpret them.”²²

Eliade’s conclusions were also found wanting because they were based on his presuppositions and his research was carried out in order to find answers to specific questions. For example, Eliade’s research was limited by his focus to renew the desacralized West by enabling it to encounter primal and Eastern religious worldviews, his stress upon primal man as the model of religious man, his emphasis upon the ‘sacred’ and the hierophanies, symbols, myths, and rituals whereby it is manifested and apprehended, his penchant for structuring data into phenomenological typologies, his notion of an archaic ontology that lies behind all religions, his assumption that

²² Frank Whaling, *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion; Volume 1: The Humanities*, Berlin: Mouton, 1984, p. 219

religious phenomena have a sui generis character and that they strike a chord in the 'trans-consciousness' of man.²³

Other scholars were also opposed to the practice of making general comparisons among religions. For example, the Islamic scholar, Hamilton Gibb (1895-1971) was of the view that every religion was "an autonomous expression of religious thought and experience, which must be viewed in and through itself and its own principles and standards."²⁴ Similarly, Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965) wrote that comparative religion means "contrasting and elaborating the particular character and structure of different religions."²⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith also stressed the individual character of every religion and was "reluctant to assume parallels and similarities, lest 'differences' be overlooked."²⁶

Just as the earlier methodologies adopted by comparative religion were based on subjective judgment, the approach of the phenomenology of religion did not make it possible for researchers to abandon their preferences and perceptions and could not provide an objective method for the collection and description of religious data. Phenomenology of religion failed to provide a way to verify interpretations or to choose between alternative accounts of the data. These limitations rendered the phenomenology of religion inadequate as a reliable method for comparative religion. Douglas Allen concludes by asking: "Does this leave the phenomenology of religion with a large number of very personal, extremely subjective, hopelessly fragmented interpretations of universal structures and meanings, each relativistic interpretation determined by the particular situation and orientation of the individual phenomenologist?"²⁷

²³. Whaling, op. cit., p. 217

²⁴. Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Muhammedanism ,An Historical Survey*, 3rd edition, Oxford: OUP. 1978, preface, p. vi

²⁵. Hendrik Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith*, London: Lutterworth, 1956, p. 76

²⁶. Bennett, op. cit., p. 105

²⁷. Douglas Allen, "Phenomenology of Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, op. cit., p. 284

Joachim Wach (1898-1955) criticized the phenomenological method precisely because of its insistence that one should bracket out one's values and beliefs. On the contrary, in Wach's view, the scholar should not reject the possibility that comparative religion could contribute certain values and useful attitudes to society. Wach invited his students "to abandon certain less defensible positions, notably the position of the dweller in an ivory tower totally isolated from value-judgments and presuppositions."²⁸

THE SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION

At the end of his one hundred year survey of comparative religion (1870 to 1970), Sharpe concludes that scholars of comparative religion could be separated into two main groups. The first group of scholars was primarily concerned with the objective or academic study of religion. The second group was searching for ways in which comparative religion would create greater understanding and harmony among the religions of the world. Kitagawa identifies a similar division among the scholars of comparative religion just after the first World Parliament of Religions (1893) and describes the type of scholar of comparative religion who had become dissatisfied with the dispassionate approach of science. He wrote that "What interested many ardent supporters of the parliament was the religious and philosophical inquiry into the possibility of the unity of all religions, and not the scholarly, religio-scientific study of the religions."²⁹

Kitagawa goes on to say that, during these years, "many liberals were naively optimistic about social progress as well as the 'stuff of human brotherhood' crossing religious lines."³⁰ In short, a division was forming between scholars for whom comparative religion should remain a scientific, objective method and other scholars for whom comparative religion should make a contribution to society at the global level. According to the latter group of scholars, comparative religion could no longer remain detached from the struggles of humanity. As Sharpe observes, "The historian of

²⁸. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 275

²⁹. Mircea Eliade and J.M. Kitagawa (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 4

³⁰. *ibid.*, p. 5

religion might find himself playing an active role in the world's cultural dialogue, rather than merely sitting on the sidelines as a disinterested observer."³¹

We noted above that Wach belonged to the group of scholars who thought that comparative religion should make a contribution to society. In his view, comparative religion should provide not only 'a clear vision of what religious experience can mean' and 'what forms its expression may take', but also, and more importantly, 'what it might do for man'.³² Some scholars were suggesting that comparative religion was becoming more akin to art or literary criticism than to natural or even social science.³³

A NEW APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

As we saw at the beginning of this survey, some scholars of comparative religion had asserted in the 19th century that it was only a matter of time before science would explain the meaning and functions of religion. In this paper, I have traced the history of the relationship between science and the study of religion. It has become clear that scholars of comparative religion were trying to explain religion using the rational categories of the Enlightenment. Eventually, this approach was considered unsatisfactory because it reified the religions by viewing them as "things" or objects that could be classified according to abstract categories. Scholars of religion began to realize that positive science could not discover the underlying essence of religion because abstract rationalism could not explain the unique quality of religious phenomena.³⁴

³¹. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 280

³². *ibid.*, p. 275

³³. cf. the views of William Oxtoby in Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 249

³⁴. In line with this view, Anwar Alam says that one of the factors responsible for the slow recognition of the Gulen Movement in contemporary society is "the modern knowledge system," which cannot understand religious phenomena. Alam explains: "The dominance of instrumental rationality in modernity and its fragmented and utilitarian approach hinders a fuller understanding of religious phenomena." Anwar Alam, *For The Sake of Allah, The Origin, Development, and Discourse of the Gulen Movement*, New Jersey: Blue Dome Press, 2019, p. 2

The method known as the phenomenology of religion tried to circumvent this process of reification by “bracketing out” all presuppositions about the object “out there” and focusing on the consciousness of the subject. According to phenomenology, consciousness and not the rational subject is the foundation of all knowledge. Hence, phenomenology of religion began to examine what actually happened within consciousness as a consequence of the religious response to God or to the divine. But this method was also found wanting because it could not move beyond subjective perceptions and conclusions.

Since the 19th century, scholars have become increasingly aware that there is much more to knowledge than whatever can be discovered through scientific experiment and empirical verification. They also became convinced that there was more to religion than could be explained by the study of history. The methods of positive science were incapable of disclosing the full meaning of religious experience. For these reasons, scholars of religion became dissatisfied with the Enlightenment paradigm of history as a tool to understand the complex reality of religious traditions.³⁵ In short, ‘science,’ ‘history,’ and even ‘religion’ itself are terms that have emerged out of Enlightenment rationalism and reflect a limited approach to knowledge. It seems that we need a new approach to the study of religion.

A PLURALIST VIEW OF TRUTH

Our survey of the scientific study of religion has exposed the limitations of the scientific method for the study of religion. It follows that scholars of religion can no longer claim scientific neutrality and objectivity. In the light of these epistemological issues, one wonders what prospects remain for the study of religion and for interreligious understanding. Can the study of

³⁵ According to Moltmann: “In the seventeenth century, the concept of ‘history’ began to develop as an all-embracing paradigm for interpreting human beings and nature, God and the world . . . The paradigm ‘history’ does not take in the whole of reality; it splits up its wholeness. So we must go beyond this modern paradigm and develop a new one which will grasp nature *and* spirit, history *and* nature, as a unity, and will integrate what has been divided.” Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, London: SCM Press, 1994, p. 76 & pp. 82-83

religion be in any way objective and constructive? What are the prospects for mutual religious understanding and dialogue?

One response to these questions is to assert that it will always remain essential for scholars of religion to examine their presuppositions and assumptions. This will remain an important task for any further study of religion and other religions. As Catherine Cornille reminds us, all interreligious understanding is always colored by one's own religious framework.³⁶ Hence, scholars of religion will need to remain vigilant with regard to possible presuppositions, assumptions and evaluations that can undermine their research.

Following on from my first observation, I would suggest that future scholars of religion could be more willing to declare their own position with regard to the three traditional attitudes or approaches to the truth of other religions, namely: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.³⁷ Clearly, an exclusivist approach, which does not acknowledge the truth of another religion, will lead to very different conclusions about that religion as compared to a pluralist approach. According to Catherine Cornille, exclusivism is viewed "as the source of anti-semitism, colonialism, racism, and Western imperialism. Awareness of these dynamics may thus lead to reticence about imposing one's own judgment on the teachings of other religions. Pluralism here thus represents an attempt to compensate for the distortions in understanding and judgment that have colored the history of interreligious engagement."³⁸

One important characteristic of the postmodern study of religion could be that scholars of religion will show more readiness to acknowledge their own theological disposition regarding the truth of other religions by rejecting the exclusivist orientation, which has led to declarations of

³⁶. Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, West Sussex, Wiley Blackwell, 2020, p. 50

³⁷. Cornille provides a helpful analysis of these different approaches in *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, op. cit., chapter 2, pp. 45 - 65

³⁸. Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, op. cit., p. 61

superiority by one religion over another hereby causing much suspicion and animosity.

Hence forward it is to be hoped that scholars of religion will adopt a more inclusive or even a pluralist approach to the truth of other religions. According to Cornille, "In order to avoid the danger of relativism on the one hand, and sectarianism on the other, religions claiming universal truth thus cannot but engage the reality of religious plurality, both in general and in its particular expressions in the teachings and practices of other religions."³⁹

Further research needs to be done regarding the meaning and implications of a pluralist orientation to the truth of other religions.⁴⁰ Recognizing and respecting the truth of other religions is the most objective and most appropriate approach to understanding religion and other religions in the circumstances of today's world.⁴¹ This means that scholars with a pluralist approach to the study of other religions are more likely to engage in a constructive encounter with the religions of the world.

³⁹. Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, op. cit., p 173

⁴⁰. The articles published in the book by David Ray Griffin (ed.), *Deep Religious Pluralism*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, are expressions of an effort in this direction. Another reflection on the relation of Islam to other religions is *The Other in the Light of the One*, by Reza Shah-Kasemi, Islamic Texts Society, 2010

⁴¹. As Ruzgar explains: "One of the most important reasons why pluralism has been so important, especially during recent times, is the fact that, given the present world situation, we can no longer isolate ourselves from exposure to other religious, cultural, and ethnic diversities. This exposure helps us understand and appreciate the true nature and value of the other." Mustafa Ruzgar, "Islam and Deep Religious Pluralism," in David Ray Griffin (ed.), *Deep Religious Pluralism*, op. cit., p. 165

OFF THE CUSHION AND INTO THE MARKETPLACE

BOM HYON SUNIM

(Gabriele Rose)

ABSTRACT:

All major religions share a common concern for service to humanity by their ethical approach and moral guidance to their adherents to cultivate goodness and righteousness. Each in their own distinct way teaches those fundamentals, which help, support, enhance and shape a morally edifying, socially acceptable and wholesome conduct. All the religious encourage the human pursuit of happiness and the fulfillment of the core ideals of love, mercy, compassion, wisdom, respect, altruism and forgiveness. There are societies in which people experience a decline of religious practice and the adherents of all faiths increasingly face the challenge to engage in the public sphere, if they wish to be relevant. Buddhism and Buddhists still avow that awakening to daily life is authentic to being Buddhist but with the rising levels of ecological concerns and social-cultural issues they are moving off the cushion to engage in compassionate action in the marketplace. This paper attempts to consider Buddhist social engagement through an interfaith lens with a specific reference to its historical and contemporary teachings that would ascertain the attitudinal change necessary for social change.

INTRODUCTION

"Be like the flower that gives its fragrance to even the hand that crushes it."
- Ali ibn Abi Talib

Part of the great diversity of humankind is the equally diverse religions and belief systems which evolved over several millennia. But what then is the role of religion in our time? Is it still relevant for human beings today in a situation of unprecedented complex global issues? A revered Buddhist prelate Dalai Lama observes that "religion is an instrument to bring mental

peace and satisfaction, mental comfort with certain faith.”¹ Although the numerous philosophical traditions, doctrines and practice forms may differ, their core intention has been to facilitate and promote order and values of love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, humility and self-discipline.

Revisiting the fundamentals of a tradition without being fundamentalist would be of immense value in resuscitating them. Recovering the primordial message would be of significance not just for the adherent of that particular tradition but would provide all with a fresh reading of it. The increasing animosity and violence especially in the name of religion have brought unpredictable challenges to the core teachings of religion as a catalyst struggling to maintain social order. The differences within religion are irrevocable but the abiding spiritual suggest that there is a possibility of a ‘core’, ‘outside the tent’.

Each of the founders of the religious traditions preached and taught in response to deep human suffering, disorder, turmoil, confusion and social unrest and yet that there was a possibility for beauty and meaning in life. In an increasingly diverse yet profoundly interdependent world, there is a compelling challenge for those interested in religion, its philosophical traditions, doctrine and practices, which could help people to transcend their differences, failing which religions could easily be made redundant and become engulfed in conflict and dissension.

BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTION TO PEACEMAKING

Some associate Buddhism as a tradition with an inward look, while others have described as ‘naval gazing’² or ‘flight out of the world’ (*fugamundi*)³ or

¹. Dalai Lama (online talk, 2011). Also see. *Collected Wheel Publications* Vol XIX, No. 281-295, Buddhist Publication Society (BPS) 1976, and also see *Teachings from a Monk's Life*, Parallax Press. 2016, p. 17.

². Particularly Max Weber's (1864-1871) Orientalist reduction and a fantasy reconstruction of Buddhism to be an individual pursuit of bliss and emancipation.

³. Muller (1823-1900), was a great scholar, an Indologist of the highest calibre. However, his suggestion of Buddhism being ‘asocial’ tradition had been the centre of criticism. Many scholars are of the view that it was because of the great passion they had for the Orient. Scholars Edward Said, would say that such was needed for the self-definition of the Occident (the West). Hence,

that it is a religion with 'a negative soteriology' (salvation).⁴ However, Buddhist teachings emphasize seeing clearly into the nature of reality. This reality of 'unsatisfactoriness' (suffering)⁵ (*dukkha*, Pali) is what the Buddha realized during his long 45 years of preaching and showing wisdom and compassion by practicing the middle path (*Majjhima Patipada* Pali). This is a credible attitude towards ethical and wholesome living, which provides sufficient tools for active involvement in the world's struggles. While there are meditative practices which emphasize the elimination of desire (*tanha*) in the interest of attaining tranquility and spiritual perfection, there are also voices among contemporary practitioner-academics such as Hershock (1996) who observes, 'to place too strong an emphasis on this is to miss an important social element which has long been stressed by Zen Buddhist masters sharply critical of these quietistic elements, and who urge instead, a total immersion in the flux of daily life, leaving no 'bolt-hole' for transcendental retreat from it.'⁶

The Buddha himself, was born into a climate of huge religious, social and political upheaval. There was a growing discontent among people concerning entrenched authority in society due to Vedic social stratification that burdened the masses, the acute power of *brahmins* with their excessive emphasis on rituals and *bhaktism*.⁷ The Buddha was openly critical of sacrificial practices and he spoke out against the caste division which sentenced the lowest castes to a life of poverty and social ostracism.

both of them (Weber & Muller) were part of a scholarship that catered to the preferred scholarship of the era.

4. This view was expressed by John Paul II in an interview which later became a book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. It was published originally in Italian, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore and in English by Alfred A. Knopf, Random House, Inc. (1994). John Paul and the book came under severe criticism especially by the Buddhist scholars who counter argued his negative proposition as one of 'crossing the threshold of another tradition' without right advice, shallow scholarship and insensitivity.

5. The original Pali word *dukkha* traditionally translated into English by Pali Text Society (PTS) does not convey what it means in classical Buddhist literature. The best nuance to the original Pali word is arguably conveyed.

6. Hershock, Peter, D. *Liberating Intimacy: Enlightenment and Social Virtuosity in Ch'an Buddhism*, State University of New York Press, Albany NY 86, 1996, p.86

7. *Bhakti* is devotion (*bhakta* is a devotee), but it grew as movement within the Hindu context. The ritual oriented homage (*puja*) which was considered to be divinely ordained. Buddha, among others, was an arch critic of such institutional domination over the life of the people.

His early teachings (*dhamma*)⁸ attracted the who suffered great discontent and injustice. His understanding of the fundamental idea of impermanence (*annica*), that everything is in a process of change or in a state of flux; (even though known in the Greek world)⁹ was refreshingly new to his hearers because of the specific moral implication of his concept of impermanence (*anicca*).

Dhamma within the Mahayana (greater vehicle, circa 300 BCE) approach offered a new way. Perhaps by then human consciousness was able to understand a more expansive “view of all things - whether mundane or metaphysical - as neither permanent nor impermanent, pure nor impure, neither having a self nor not having a self - as inconceivable and inexpressible.” The bodhisattva ideal also emerged at that time, as a path of compassionate service based on the ultimate realization of transcendental wisdom (*prajna-paramita*) and culminating in the “perfection of wisdom”.¹⁰ This teaching is a core pillar of the Mahayana path and the resultant Chan-Zen tradition which found its roots in China around 600 CE, transmitted by an Indian monk-sage known simply as Bodhidharma.

Bodhidharma, the founder and the first patriarch of Chan (Zen) Buddhism, taught in a directly experiential way that envisions a transformed cognitive state liberated from the ordinary, discriminating and judgmental patterns of everyday reasoning. Huineng, sixth patriarch of the lineage, followed closely in Bodhidharma’s footsteps, seeking a transformation but not transcendence, of ‘ordinary mind’. What marks Huineng’s enlightenment is its transformed engagement with, not a rejection of the passions. It seems that this specific approach and thinking in fact did lead a movement that distanced itself and became known as the ‘Southern Buddhism’

8. This is Pali word (*Dharma* Snkt.) has multiple meaning, righteousness (*Sadiq* Arb., *Sedeq* Heb.), moral teaching, path. Also used in several contexts among various religious traditions, hardly and definitively defined.

9. The idea of ‘flux’ (change) was being debated before the Buddha (*anicca*/impermanence), particularly among the Milesian philosophers, Thales, Ionian (642-548), Anaximander (610-546) and Anaximenes (circa. 545). (N.B. However, the *Mahayana* and the *Theravada* interpretation of these concepts vary each depending on the schools of thought that emerged in history within both major wings identified in this paper).

¹⁰ *Pragnaparanita, Hridayasutra, Heart Sutra*, (trans, 2005), a poetically an interesting prose

(Theravada). “Good friends, it is precisely the passions that are awoken. If you hold onto or are caught by a past moment or thinking of it and are then seduced into error – that is being a commoner. Awakening in the very next thought or moment is being a buddha.”¹¹

Hershock (1996) suggests that what distinguishes Zen from other Buddhist traditions of the time is its shift of emphasis from traditional sutra-study to an experiential engagement with conditioned nature, which can release people from the stranglehold of their deep conditioning and give them the possibility to express, in any circumstances whatsoever, their true and original buddha-nature.¹²

RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Buddhist teaching on emptiness (*sunyata*) offers the insight that all things, both objects and *dharmas*, are empty of anything self-existent. Yet, if the categories of race and religion are illusions or social constructs, then what is the tension, the fear, and the ultimate hatred related to them that arises within the human psyche? Silence concerning race and other such social differences may create the illusion that all is well in our spiritual communities but the tension is palpable and the failure to approach it honestly gives rise to grief, humiliation, guilt, numbness, fear and rage. This tension is also most precious because it challenges the un-reflexive view that being human is the common ground of humanity. This perspective, negates the unique differences that people may encounter. ‘Being human’ does not provide enough common ground to navigate the challenges. People must also learn to trust - but what is it that they could trust? The Japanese Zen Master Koyabashi alludes to such a ‘trust’ in its nascence: A world of dew, And within every dewdrop A world of struggle. And yet ...¹³

¹¹. Hershock, Peter, D., Chan Buddhism, Vol 2, *Dimensions of Asian spirituality*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2005, p. 68-9.

¹². Op. cit. Hershock, 86.

¹³. Koyabashi, I., “*Tsuyu no yowatsuyu no yonagara sari nagara*” See. *The Dumpling Field: Haiku of Isse* Athens. Ohio: Swallow Press, 1991, p.17.

Buddhism teaches that humans are all ‘of one body’. But what can this possibly mean in the face of the stark differences? In the interconnectedness and in all embodiment, people may recognize an intimacy within and between humans and the rest of the animate world. ‘Humans are all one’ but the conditioned experience of interconnected intimacy can be uncomfortable and difficult. Yet, spiritual liberation cannot be attained if they turn away from the realities that insult, demean or render others invisible. One cannot close one’s eyes to these phenomena if one really wants to live an authentic life. Zenju Manuel (2015) speaks of a “way of tenderness, that cannot be trained or taught, nor can it be practiced”. She says that “complete tenderness simply rises up as an experience, void of hatred, for oneself and others”. It comes when life has ‘sat you in your deepest down’, when all the screaming and protesting is silent – when there’s nothing left to do but sit until mental distress or confusion passes. It may well present itself when rage is “at its height’ in us”¹⁴

I recall watching a recent release film: *The Insult*.¹⁵ It is set in Beirut and is a story about two men: one is an ideological zealot of the Lebanon Christian party, and the other is a Palestinian ‘refugee’ who has lived in Beirut for decades. One is a ‘big-mouth reactive’, the other seethes in silence. Both value their dignity more than common sense and seem to regard humiliation as a kind of existential death. They have an argument about a pipe that drips water from an apartment terrace onto the street below. After an angry exchange, one demands a formal apology and then a punch is thrown. Having now escalated the matter, neither can figure out how to back down without a loss of ‘face’. The matter finds its way into the Courts where memories of past atrocities are dredged up by the many not-so-silent observers in the gallery. We are reminded that the political is always personal, and that resentment and hatred do not necessarily recede when the fighting stops. People have long memories, and so do groups whose identities rest in part on seeing one another as enemies. In the final scenes

¹⁴ Manuel, Zenju Earthlyn., *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race, Sexuality and Gender*, Wisdom Publications, Boston 2015, p.27-28

¹⁵ *The Insult* (Film) 2018, Directed by Ziad Doueiri, Received the Academy Award for best International Feature Film.

there is a surprising shift, which I leave for your imagination you could look for the CD copy of the movie.

The story highlights the fact that personal matters are neither separate from political concerns, nor identical with them. At several moments, I was perched on the edge of my seat, expecting a hug or handshake, signaling by-gones will be by-gones. But the truth is, everyone who holds a grudge does so for a reason, and thus fears that letting go of it would mean the loss of something core to them, something precious. So, people hold on to their rage, grief, and stockpile it for fear that their suffering will go unrecognized, holding on to it as proof of being human and even misinterpret it as failed justice.

The way of tenderness which Manuel (2015) describes, is to gradually “let go, to allow rage and anger to flow in and out again and again, instead of holding on to it, stockpiling it ... only a liberating tenderness as a way of lessening and finally removing the potency of the long, tragic pasts as sentient beings ... will annihilate the unacceptable differences.” This way of tenderness is described as a body-mind “heartfelt acknowledgment of all embodied differences ... It’s an unfolding experience of life that is ever-present in all living beings, and yet it does not deny the uniqueness or similarities of our embodiment. It simply arises along the path of life - if we allow it.”¹⁶

KARMA AND EMPTINESS

Interestingly the concept of karma traverses through three major Indic traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Buddha evokes a moral and an ethical ramification on his understanding of karma. He enhances the concept of karma in a new direction but still solidly rooted in the foundational teachings on impermanence (*anicca*), where everything and everyone is temporary, no self (*anatta*) where one sees that everything and everyone is without any abiding substance, and the concept of *dukkha*

¹⁶ Op cit., Manuel, Z. (2015) Pp. 29-29.

(suffering/'unsatisfactoriesss') where one finds that one's grasping after that which is passing and without substance is a festering sore in the heart.

Buddhism teaches that individual 'karmic behaviour' patterns are created by the struggles of the individual human predicament. They condition the behaviour of the individual and the subsequent rounds of birth and rebirth. But this 'karmic inheritance' is also expressed as 'social karma'. Specific to time and place, different social cultures arise, whether of a group, a community, a social class or a civilization. The young are socialised to their inherited culture. Consciously and unconsciously they assimilate the norms of the approved behaviour, the 'good' and the 'bad' (even ugly) of that culture. However, it is 'individual karmic action' that links the individual to these institutions and belief systems. Each individual is a light-reflecting jewel in Indra's net, at the points where time and space intersect. Each reflects the light of all and all of each.¹⁷

Each age receives the collective 'karmic inheritance' of the last, is conditioned by it, and yet also struggles to refashion it. And within each human society, institution, social class, and subculture, as well as individual, all struggle to establish their identity and perpetuate their existence. Men and women make their own history, but they make it under specific 'karmic conditions', inherited from previous generations, collectively, as well as individually. The struggle is against what was nurtured as well as nature, manifested in the one consciousness. "The present generation living in this world under great pressure, under a very complicated system, amidst confusion. Everybody talks about peace, justice, equality but in practice it is a difficult objective to achieve. This is not because the individual person is bad but because the overall

¹⁷. See. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra (the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, Sakt.) is one of the most influential Mahayana sutras of East Asian Buddhism. The English translation is called Flower Garland Sutra, Flower Adornment Sutra, or Flower Ornament Scripture by the translator himself (trans) 1993 Cleary, T., Shambala, 1993.

environment, the pressures, the circumstances are so strong, so influential."¹⁸

BUDDHIST SOCIAL ACTION

Buddhism suggests a pragmatic approach to life which starts from certain fundamental propositions about how people experience the world and how they act in it. Individuals arise within this world through causes and conditions. Their choices and actions create circumstances for themselves and others. Everyone of them is caught within an indivisible web of destiny. And while this is true, the emptiness (*sunyata*) of all things is also true, as fully true as the play of cause and effect; and it too, joins them in a single family of things. There is a great turning that is possible here and now, a turning of the heart towards the suffering of this world. It includes the suffering of the religiously oppressed, the racially vilified, women, refugees and the politically persecuted. There are injustices right now, and people are not in a position to wait until the solution is found by others. All things come to fruition in their own time but finding the harmonies and acting within the realities is critical. It is so important that people are not caught up in old narratives that keep them trapped in their stories of shame and revenge.

Buddhist social action is responsive to social and 'individual karma'. Immediately, it is simply concerned with relieving suffering; ultimately, it is profoundly concerned with creating social conditions, which will favour the ending of suffering through the individual achievement of transcendent wisdom. Thich Naht Hanh, the Vietnamese monk, was one of the exponents of the concept of Engaged Buddhism, which links mindfulness with social action - 'mindfulness must be engaged'. If, not engaged, then it remains aloof from the core of Buddhism. In his book, *At Home in the World*, he states, "Once we see that something needs to be done, we must take

¹⁸. See. *Buddhism in Social Action*, Collected Wheel Publications, Vol. XIX, No. 285-286, Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), Kandy, Sri Lanka 2012, p.93

action. Seeing and action go together. Otherwise, what is the point in seeing?"¹⁹

Hanh's essential teaching on activism is that mindfulness gives people the ability to find peace in themselves so that their actions come from a place of compassion. Through their practice, both in the world and in meditation, the delusion of a struggling self becomes more and more transparent, while the conflicting opposites of good and bad, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty, oppression and freedom are seen and understood in a wisdom both serene and vigilant. This wisdom arises as the sensitivity of the heart and the clarity of thought. The mainspring of Buddhist social action arises from the heart of a ripening compassion. Thus, Zen practice is an excellent ground for social engagement. The power or wisdom obtained by practicing Zen in the world of action is like a rose that rises from the fire. It can never be destroyed. "The rose that rises from the midst of flames becomes all the more beautiful and fragrant the nearer the fire rages".²⁰

Mahayana Buddhists cultivate the heart-mind (*bodhicitta*), the mind that strives toward awakening, empathy, and compassion for the benefit of all sentient beings. Renunciation, *bodhicitta* and wisdom, are the three principle aspects of the bodhisattva²¹ path, a path of cultivating wisdom in action. For the sake of all beings, we step onto this path, yet very few of people can claim to fully live it. But neither will we attain the ideal by turning our backs on the world and denying the compassionate Buddha nature in us that reaches out to suffering humanity, however stained by self-love those feelings may be. Only through slowly 'wearing out the shoe of samsara' can we hope to achieve this ideal, not through some process of incubation. In the two-pronged path that is the Buddhist path to freedom, some will

¹⁹. Thich Naht Hanh, and (illustration by), Deantoni, J., *At Home in the World, Stories and Essential Teaching from a Monk's Life*, Parallax Press. 2016 for general reading and also see. <https://yujiearthman.wordpress.com/2017/08/25>

²⁰. Hakuin, ZM. (1971) *Zen Master Hakuin, Collected Wheel Publications* Vol XIX, No. 281-295, Buddhist Wheel Publication, (BPS), Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1971, p. 34.

²¹. It refers to any person who is on the path towards Buddhahood. In the Early Buddhist schools as well as modern in Theravada Buddhism, a bodhisattva refers to anyone who has made a resolution to become a Buddha. However, the Mahayana School of thought has developed a vast body of literature and on the concept of bodhisattva.

favour the way of compassion, while others will choose the way of wisdom; eventually the two faculties must be balanced, each complementing and ripening the other. Meanwhile, we do not know how our actions will turn out. There are simply too many possibilities. But this does not excuse us, one must act.

SKILLFUL MEANS

There is a wonderful Zen *koan* ²² which points to this dilemma: to act or not to act? Nanchuan Kills a Cat appears in a collection of 1,700 *koans* ²³ employed by masters and students alike who dabble in the art of the elusive. The story goes: “Zen Master Nanchuan saw the monks of the eastern and western halls fighting over a cat. Seizing the cat, he told the monks: ‘If any of you can say a word of Zen, you will save the cat.’ No one answered, so Nanchuan cut the cat in two. That evening [the monk] Joju returned to the monastery and Nanchuan told him what had happened. Joju removed his sandals, placed them on his head and walked out. As he was leaving, Nanchuan called out to him: If you had been there, you would have saved the cat!”²⁴

This case is one of the best-known and disturbing of all the Zen stories. It is a little similar to a story in the Bible about the wise King Solomon and a baby. Two women are arguing over a baby; both are claiming to be the mother. They come to Solomon to settle their case, each believing they are best suited to raise the child. Solomon’s answer to solving the dispute is to have the baby cut in two so that each woman can have a fair share. But before he can raise his sword, one of the women shouts, “No, don’t do it! I am not the mother. Give the child to her!” Thus, Solomon discovers who is the real mother, for who else but the mother who cares so much for her

²². It is a riddle or a puzzle that Zen Buddhists mobilise during meditation to help them dissect greater and truths about the world and the nature of reality.

²³. See. *Koans 2005 - Nanchuan Kills a Cat*, Zoketsu Norman Fischer (2005). Published in Book of Serenity #9 and the Blue Cliff Record #63 and the Gateless Barrier #14. See also. <http://everydayzen.org.192-96-211-44.sectorshared.net/teachings/2005/koans-2005-nanchuan-kills-cat>. Sighted on 03/10/2019.

²⁴. See. Cleary, T., and Cleary J.C., *The Blue Cliff Record*, (Case #63: Nanchuan’s Cat), Shambala Press, Boulder (2005), p.358.

child's welfare would endeavor to stop King Solomon from killing her child.

In the case of Nanchuan's 'cat story', I don't think you can 'fix it' with the same answer – believe me, I tried! It's more than ten years since I first began to sit with this *koan* and it still has the power to disturb me. There's a great sadness in my heart for all the people involved, indeed for all of us who are caught in this human condition. It's hard to avoid getting caught up in one side or another, in life's endless entanglements; and aren't people all entangled in something? Aren't they all caught up in clinging too hard, so hard sometimes that blood is spilt, literally or metaphorically speaking?

What do you think was going on for Joju as he put his sandals on his head and walked away? I can't help feeling there was a well of grief in him - and isn't that human? Sometimes there's nothing we can do to change a situation, but we can be present to that tender, raw spot in ourselves, that ache of vulnerability, which in such times, is perhaps the best in us. If the elimination of a single life reminds us of our impermanence and of the preciousness of life, perhaps it is the shock we need to wake us from the dream. In Nanchuan's response too, I feel a weary sadness when he says to Joju, "If you had been there, you would have saved the cat!"

CONCLUSION

To be born into this human body is rare indeed.²⁵ And to have access to the great Wisdom teachings and opportunity to practice is even more rare.

In my tradition, with ordination, we also receive the bodhisattva vows which call us back into body lifetime after lifetime, until all sentient beings are liberated from the bonds of karma. On the face of it, such a proposition

²⁵. The story behind this reference is found in the parable of the blind turtle in the Miscellaneous *Āgama Sutra*. A blind turtle, whose life span is immeasurable *kalpas*, lives at the bottom of the sea. Once every one hundred years it rises to the surface. There is only one log floating in the sea where the turtle swims. Since the turtle is blind and the log is tossed about by the wind and waves, the likelihood of the turtle reaching the log is extremely remote. It is even rarer, says Shakyamuni, to be born a human being; having been born human, one should use the opportunity to master the four noble truths and attain emancipation.

would seem untenable. However, if we can grasp that this body and mind are actually empty, that there's nothing for our suffering to rest on, then we are free even as we return into body, lifetime after lifetime. I am reminded of this verse of wisdom and inspiration to end this reflective essay ... When the wind blows on the water it creates bubbles; when the bubbles disperse there is only water.

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BOOK REVIEWS

DAVID THOMAS (ed.),

Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations.

London and New York 2018.

ISBN 978-1-138-81871-2 (hbk) Pp. xiv + 439.

The present work constitutes a landmark in the wide field of publications concerning Christian-Muslim Relations. It attempts to offer a comprehensive survey of the entire history of these relations that goes back to the early seventh century. The editor, Prof. David Thomas of the University of Birmingham (UK), has brought together in this substantial volume 43 authors from all over the English-speaking Western World, including a number of authors from the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Australia and New Zealand. The contributions deal in Part I with Christian-Muslim Relations in history (beginnings; the Middle Ages; the early modern and modern periods), in Part II with the theological attitudes in Christian Muslim encounters and in Part III with Christians and Muslims in contemporary societies. Each of the authors is an acknowledged specialist and an author in the field indicated in this volume. David Thomas is a widely acknowledged master in the field of classical Arab Christian theology as well as in Christian-Muslim relations throughout history. For many years now he has been chief editor of the renowned quarterly *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* published by the Birmingham (UK) Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies and editor of the unique multi volume publication by E.J. Brill Publishers of *Christian-Muslim relations: a bibliographical history*. He contributes the concisely formulated, comprehensive 'Introduction' to the wide spectrum of themes covered by the 44 essays assembled in this volume. He has succeeded admirably well in seeing to it that all authors of the 44 contributions to the present volume have adhered closely to the plan of writing succinct essays on the topic assigned to them, not exceeding 8 pages, including the most valuable 'References' and suggestions for 'Further Reading', all presented in identical format. All contributions succeed in compressing a maximum of

relevant information and analysis in succinct, most readable texts. The reviewer may be forgiven for singling out Alex Mallet's balanced contribution 'The Crusades', David M. Freidenreich's 'Christians and Muslims in another's legal texts' and Alexander Treiger's 'Mutual influences and borrowings' as having impressed this reviewer in a special way among the other remarkable texts presented. Sandra Toenies Keating's 'Major concepts in Muslim-Christian encounters' constitutes a highly readable conclusion of Part I and II of the volume and offers more than the words that the title of her essay announce.

The Index of the volume disappoints, because quite a number of important names and themes dealt with in the texts of the volume simply do not appear in it. It is less than complete and erratic in its choice of entries. It does, just for example, not mention 'Pact of Umar'; Mudéjar; Morisco; Cordoba; the martyrs of Cordoba; Hizmet Movement (Gülen) da'wa; mission, although in one or the other of the texts each of these terms is mentioned and explained. As far as Part III is concerned, important initiatives, institutions and scholars from outside the Anglophone world have not been taken into consideration and in consequence only relatively few publications written in languages other than English are mentioned in the bibliographical references. Surprisingly, there seems to be no Muslim scholar among the contributors! There is hardly any reference to Christian-Muslim Relations neither in the various countries of continental Europe nor in Francophone West Africa. There should have been mention of the role of certain Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe, Africa and Asia as well as of the Centers of Christian-Muslim Documentation and Encounter funded by them as, for instance, the 'Christlich-Islamische Begegnungs-und Dokumentationsstelle. V.' (CIBEDO Germany) and the 'Service National pour les Relations avec l'Islam' (SRI, Paris). Also lacking is the mention of such renowned and productive institutions of research and publication in the field of Christian - Muslim dialogue as the 'Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies' (IDEO) at Cairo and the 'OASIS International Foundation' at Milan and Venice (Italy) with its biannual journal OASIS, published in Italian, English, French and Arabic.

In spite of all these limitations the present volume is definitely a unique and important resource in the field of Christian Muslim studies. The photo on the front-cover of the volume does not seem to do justice to this outstanding publication.

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CATHERINE CORNILLE,

Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020.

ISBN 978-1-119-53522-5. Pp. ix + 214. AUD \$40.

In recent years, comparative theology has emerged as a constructive approach to the study of religion in the pluralist environment of the modern world. This book discusses the various ways that scholars of comparative theology discover a deeper meaning in other religious traditions while remaining firmly rooted in their own. The book is a clear presentation of the issues, views and debates going on in the field of comparative theology. The author says that comparative theology “represents a new frontier of theological thinking” (p. 150) and that it “opens the door to a vast new source of religious insight” (p. 151). She shows a remarkable familiarity with the enormous amount of research being done in this new field.

In contrast to comparative religion, which seeks to understand other religions by scrutinizing religious phenomena, the goal of comparative theology is the advancement of truth by learning from other religions (p. 115). Comparative theology is open to religious truth wherever it may be found, in other religious traditions, or in the search for truth beyond any particular religion (p. 179). It has no interest in making judgments about

other religions, but seeks to gain greater clarity and deeper insight into the truth of one's own religious tradition by seeing the self through the other.

The book discusses the distinction between confessional and meta-confessional comparative theology at some length. Confessional comparative theology involves a process of engaging in constructive theological reflection with other religions from within the religious framework of a particular religious tradition (p. 18). Meta-confessional comparative theology deliberately seeks to pursue religious truth without being tied to any doctrinal or ritual constraints (p. 178).

Moreover, comparative theology offers six types of learning from other religions, namely, intensification, rectification, recovery, reinterpretation, appropriation and reaffirmation. Firstly, intensification refers to the study of similar texts or teachings from different religions and leads to a clearer meaning (p. 117). Secondly, rectification, by which scholars are prepared for a change in their own self-understanding by rectifying misunderstood or distorted views of the other (p. 121). Thirdly, engagement with another religion could lead to the recovery or rediscovery of the teachings or practices of one's own religion (p. 124). Fourthly, another very challenging type of learning pursued in comparative theology involves the reinterpretation of one tradition through the categories or philosophical framework of another (p. 129). A fifth type of comparative theology involves the appropriation by one tradition of new elements derived from another religious tradition (p. 134), leading to mutual enrichment and transformation between the religions (p. 135). In the process of appropriation, the meaning of symbols, rituals, and categories shifts to fit the new religious context (p. 136). The final type of learning gained through comparative theology involves a new appreciation or a reaffirmation of the truths of one's own tradition (p. 137).

The main focus of the book is on examples from the Christian comparative theology (p. 187) and the writings of Francis Clooney are the source of the many of the book's examples of comparative theological method and learning. Consequently, there are abundant examples of comparative

theology drawn from the theological engagement between Christianity and Hinduism and also between Christianity and Buddhism. The book provides only a few examples of comparative theology in the engagement between Christianity and Islam. This lack may be indicative of the complexity or sensitive nature of this relationship in the modern world. One reason for this lack, according to the author, is that comparative theology was born naturally from the recognition of other religions as potential sources of truth and came to establish itself in departments of Christian theology as the natural synthesis of theology and religious studies (p. 188). One wonders if there could be other reasons as well for the development of comparative theology in a Christian environment.

This book provides a succinct, profound and carefully worded discussion of a large body of research on comparative theology. As a result, the reader is sometimes overwhelmed by the complexity of the argument and the richness of the expression. On the other hand, the abundant references to scholars engaged in different fields of comparative theology provides the reader with a rich inventory of resource material for further research on comparative theology.

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The Case for Christ: a Journalist's personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998,
ISBN 978-0-310-60383-2. P. 386. US \$ 5.99

An investigative journalist, Strobel in this book with a legal background and the formal legal editor of the Chicago Tribune, retraces his own spiritual journey. Though he describes himself as an atheist and a skeptic,

the person of Jesus Christ attracts him. He probes with great tenacity the evidence for the truth of biblical Christianity. In order to find answers, Strobel makes a case for Christ and travels extensively to interview thirteen leading scholars and authorities with impeccable academic credentials. He asks difficult but logical questions about Jesus of Nazareth and the Biblical record of his life.

In the quest for truth, Strobel uses his experience as a legal affairs journalist to look at numerous categories of proof, namely eyewitness evidence, documentary evidence, corroborating evidence, rebuttal evidence, scientific evidence, psychological evidence, circumstantial evidence and even fingerprint evidence.

The author highlights three important issues concerning Jesus Christ, namely, the existing records about him, the person that Jesus was and his resurrection from the dead. The author questions the reliability and theological agenda of the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John based on the authenticity of the extra Biblical literature. These issues should appeal very much to a Pakistani readership where doubts about the reliability and authenticity of the Gospels sometimes prevent people from reading these ancient texts. The book concludes that the Gospel accounts of Jesus Christ cannot be explained away as legendary inventions and that they were written to preserve reliable history. The book argues that in comparison with other ancient documents, an unprecedented number of New Testament manuscripts are available and that these documents can be dated back to the period of the original writings. Written by a skeptic and a shrewd journalist who demands hard evidence, this book also makes use of scientific evidence such as archaeology to confirm or contradict the claims about Jesus' life.

The second part of the book looks at the person of Jesus and the titles that Jesus used for himself, claims that he made and attributes that he used. The book wants to find out whether Jesus really thought that he was the Messiah and the Son of God when he used these titles. Did he really fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament about himself?

In the final part, the book discusses the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In order to find out whether the resurrection was a real incident in human history, the author examines the medical evidence regarding the missing body of Jesus, the evidence for the appearances of the risen Jesus and other circumstantial evidence. The author makes a very strong case for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I found this book very helpful as it seeks knowledge based on facts and evidence. The author encourages the reader to approach the evidence as a fair and impartial juror. He investigates the historical evidence concerning Jesus by subjecting it to the same tests that are used by defense attorneys in court cases. Every chapter of the book begins with a real human case that could be brought to a court of law. This approach prepares the reader's mind for the next episode.

Another useful aspect of the book is that it asks the same question of all the 13 scholars interviewed, namely, how their findings have helped them in their own spiritual journeys. Hence, besides providing convincing information, this book encourages skeptics and believers alike to be open-minded and fair about drawing conclusions based on evidence rather than on whim and prejudice.

The book does not always go deeply into the questions raised in order to find convincing answers. Moreover, the methodology of gathering facts and information and the style of presenting the argument may not interest certain readers. In spite of these shortcomings, however, this book is a wonderful read and it has a lot to offer both to skeptics as well as to seekers of knowledge.

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HUSSAIN MOHI-UD-DIN QADRI,
Human Migration to Space and the Reality of *Yajoj and Majoj*.
Kurra-e-Arzisy Insani Hijratawr Yajooj Majoojki Haqeeqat (Urdu).
Lahore: Minhaj-ul-Quran, 2019.
ISBN 978-1-908229-16-8. Pp. 296. Rs. 590.00

This book was originally written in Urdu and has a thought provoking title. It unveils many secrets about the future of mankind. The first chapter discusses the relationship between science and Islam.

The second chapter elaborates the idea of seven earths and their infinite distances. In his view, the seven earths refer to the seven different planets, which will be inhabited by human beings.

The chapter three, claims that very first rocket was invented and used by a Muslim warrior, Sultan Tepu, in the last decade of 18th century in the Sub-Continent of South Asia even though the active human migration to space began in the middle of 20th century. Approximately one dozen space agencies in the United States, China, Israel, Iran, Italy, North Korea, South Korea, India, Japan, France and Russia are trying to conquer space sometimes at a competitive level. There is likelihood in the near future that the space agencies in Australia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka the African Union, the Arab League and South America will also join this effort. The author argues that the Islamic concept of the seven earths with human habitants will come about when a space mission is sent to Mars in 2024, possibly first step towards populating it.

The fourth chapter, the discussion takes on the possibilities of as space as new world, space as non-world, space as free world, space as part of this world and space as meta-world. The author addresses the physical, physiological and physical and psychological dangers that human beings may face in space and links these issues with Islamic predictions regarding the end of the world.

The fifth chapter narrates the important concept of Yajoj and Majoj (Aliens). The author quotes references from Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism

and Islam (Surah *Al-Kahf*). Some Muslim scholars are of the view that Yajoj and Majoj arrived the past and destroyed the world many times. Other scholars are of the opinion that Yajoj and Majoj will come again in the future and will destroy this world. The author agrees with the second opinion, which is that of the Qur'an and the Hadith.

The sixth chapter concludes that Yajoj and Majoj have not yet overcome the strongest wall of iron and lead built by King Zul Qarnain, who is still imprisoned behind that wall and that the Yajoj and Majoj and the wall exist on another planet and not on this earth. The author argues and agrees that the western concept popular of "The Aliens" is a concept that resembles that of Yajoj and Majoj.

This book fills the serious lacuna felt since colonial times when Urdu was deprived of its basic rights. The book has enriched Urdu literature in general and the scientific literature of Urdu in particular. Many Urdu readers can access the material because it is available at an affordable price. This book is a significant contribution to those interested in science, social science, science fiction studies, religious studies and more particularly futurology

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PETER C. PHAN (ed.),
Christianities in Asia.
Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
ISBN 978-1-4051-6090-2. Pp. ix + 271. US \$39.37.

This book is a cultural and religious anthology written by a diverse group of eleven contributors living in different parts of the world. Its twelve

chapters discuss the history, expansion, radical changes and current state of the various shades of Christianity that prevail throughout South Asia, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The book also discusses Christianity in Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia Japan, Korea, Laos, Myanmar, Mainland China, Mongolia, Malaysia, and Macao as well as in Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. In addition, the volume contains some entries about the Syriac Churches in the Middle East, which have very deep historical Christian roots in Syria, Lebanon Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, southern Turkey and Iran. Due to the breadth of its scope, the book presents a panoramic view of Asian Christianity as a world religion in the religious and cultural landscape of Asia.

The authors succeed in attracting and holding the interest of the reader by commenting on a wide variety of topics with their different styles of literature, art, music and poetry as an integral part of their historical study of Christianity in this vast array of countries. Moreover, the reader is introduced to the way Christianity has intermingled with indigenous religious and cultural traditions, as well as to how it has been impacted by the indigenous socio-political ideologies and other colonial and post-colonial social and freedom movements.

The book highlights the contributions of major Christian pioneers from different walks of life emerging in the field of health care, education and social services. It also indicates how various key factors in the South Asian societies, such as caste, color, class, ethnicity and nationalism have played a major role in shaping the narratives and perspectives of an indigenous Christianity.

The reader's imagination is caught by the plural of the title: Christianities in Asia. This title expresses the view that there is no single form of Christianity in the countries that have been grouped together in this book under the name Asia. Christianity in each country of this region, has evolved and taken on a different expression and a manifestation. In Pakistan, Christianity has been influenced by the predominant culture, which is Islam. In India, the concept of *varnas* has also taken root in

Christianity. In some countries, Christianity is a blend of socialism, communism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. In other Asian countries, Christianity still remains to a significant degree a foreign religion. Although Christianity is considered as the white man's religion in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the book reminds the reader that the history of Christianity in this region started in 52 CE with the arrival of St. Tomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ.

The book states that the various theological approaches and styles of all Christian denominations are to be found throughout Asia. Although the various forms of Christianity in Asia have certain traditions in common, they also reflect the different influences of post-colonial nationalism, xenophobia and denominationalism. The writers of this volume present a vivid picture of the way the Asian Church has shown courage and perseverance in the face of suffering because of various religio-political, socio-cultural and post-colonial realities. The continued impact of the Western categories has also caused Christians in Asia to suffer in multiple ways. It refers to the transfer of power from the foreign missionaries to the local leadership, but remarks that this transition of power was less than smooth because the foreign missionaries were reluctant to transfer power to the local church.

Instead of grouping Christians in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar together, it would have been better if the book had dedicated a separate chapter to each country. Since the partition of India, the socio-political dynamics of each of these countries have entirely changed. Surprisingly, the author of the chapter on these countries is 'an outsider' who is not fully aware of the religious, political, ethnic and cultural complexities of these countries. Furthermore, there is hardly any reference of Ditt, who is known as the father of a mass movement in the British Punjab. Neither is there much reference to the scholarly work of Rev. Barakat Ullah, who authored four volumes on the history of Christianity in the sub-continent of South Asia covering the Apostolic Age up to the British Indian Period.

The author could have included Myanmar in the countries of the Southeast Asian region instead of considering it as part of South Asia. It is also unfortunate that studies on Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal as well as on the important role of the South Asian Christian diaspora are completely lacking in this volume. Furthermore, there is insufficient discussion of the current state of the Christians in Pakistan, whose situation in a dominant Muslim society is unique.

In the concluding section, the book claims that the future of Asian Christianity depends on how well it engages in a triple dialogue, namely, the dialogue with Asian people, the dialogue with Asian cultures (inculturation) and the dialogue with Asian religions (inter-religious dialogue). Christianity should “speak out for the rights of the disadvantaged and powerless, against all forms of injustice” (p. 257) through a mission of love and service to promote peace and reconciliation. The book as a whole invites the readers to discover the distinctiveness and richness of Christian beliefs and practices in Asia with new expressions of world Christianity at the local and regional levels.

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FRANCIS FUKUYAMA,
Identity: The demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment.
New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
ISBN978-0-374-90674-0. Pp. xvii+218. US\$16.00.

Fukuyama explores the concept of identity as “our natural demand for the recognition of our dignity”. He takes the trajectory of intellectual and societal developments in history and ends up discussing the contemporary phenomenon of identity politics by articulating it as “a language for expressing the resentments that arise when such recognition is not

forthcoming” or the “quest for equal recognition by groups that have been marginalized by their societies.”

His endeavor to ‘explore’ the ontological and the epistemological foundations of identity is reminiscent of the classical ‘chicken-egg’ dilemma. In ‘western’ thought, the ‘dichotomic debates’ along material-moral, and self-social axes of world history have been comprehensively dealt in this book. For example, the current work equivocally ponders the religious, social and material ‘self’ by Martin Luther, Rousseau and Plato respectively. It equally deals with the ethical, moral and political explanations by Kant, Hobbes and Hegel. However, the purpose of emphasizing the words ‘explore’ is to reveal the side that he takes in this debate along the material-moral axis. The consecutive use of words like ‘intrinsically valuable’, ‘natural’, ‘intrinsic worth’ and ‘inherent dichotomy’ reveal his understanding of dignity as an inbuilt phenomenon in the human psychology, which he emphasizes in terms of ‘Thymos’ (Gk. the desire for recognition): ‘Isothymia’ (Gk. the desire for equality) and ‘Megalothymia’ (Gk. the desire for superiority).

The second level of analysis along the self-social axis runs along the same lines and leaves some questions unanswered in this text. The relationship between self and society is somewhat ambiguous. He is not very clear about the position he wants to take regarding the question whether his ‘self’ is constitutive or explanatory. For example, if identity is the desire to be recognized then it is in communication with the society and the way society plays a role in this desire. If it plays some role, then how is it intrinsic or natural?

Indeed, an example would be useful here. In a Hollywood movie “Into the Wild,” which is based on a true story, for the sake of an inner journey, someone takes a lonely expedition to a forest for the rest of his life and ends up in a traumatized death. The last words in his journal raise a big question, namely, that ‘Happiness is only real when it is shared’. It may be a desire for recognition or a genuine sharing. This suits the finding of the

author but it leaves open the question about the inner-self and what is constituted by one's outer-self.

However, there are also many writers who challenge the sharp division along both axes. For example, Arundhati Roy deconstructs the current Indian problem by challenging this level of analysis, which is limited to class analysis. She invites scholars to analyze the contemporary situation in India by focusing on the caste system. She further comments that revolutions are not only the result of particular material conditions but also of current psychology. This is an inclusive and constitutive approach.

The book is exclusive in that it draws on euro-centric philosophy and disregards intellectual input from other than Western sources. This trend is evident, for instance, when the author deals with questions of 'nationalism and religion' and 'from identity to identities'. In the chapter on nationalism and religion, it only discusses 'Islam' as a religious collective identity in the present world and in the chapter from identity to identities, it does not give much space to the different experiences of postcolonial states in terms of nationalism and identity politics.

Arguments in this book are developed on the role of the right and the left school of thought in global politics. The book discusses the significance of the ascendancy of two trends, namely, 'populist politics' and liberal democratic politics. This issue has been exemplified in the contemporary political trends of the United States and China. The main reason for the ascendancy of the 'right' has been described as the crisis or the problem with the 'left'. The author becomes nostalgic in his discussion of the past consensus of the right and the left on the values of liberal democracy.

He further criticizes the left by reducing the universal concerns of inequality and the claim for universal human rights to the group level by focusing on gay, lesbian, feminist, black or other marks of identity. This approach undermines the concerns of many other identities, for example, the white working class. The exclusion of many other identities has given

the right or the conservative political parties a justification for their concerns.

The proposed way out is to affirm the universal values of liberal democratic culture expressed in the identity of a nation. These values could be further described in terms of the “rules regarding citizenship and residency, laws on immigration and refugees and the curricula used in the public education system to teach children about the nation’s history. In addition, a bottom-up process could be initiated through art and culture and by hearing the “stories of the people”. These efforts are based on the author’s claim that ‘identity can be used to divide, but it can and has also been used to integrate’.

However, this model is more oriented towards finding a solution for the problems in the ‘West’. The author is critical of the concept of ‘dual citizenship’ to enhance the universal liberal democratic culture because it raises further questions about the processes of globalization, the international market economy and the global technological revolution.

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