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CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM APPROACHES
TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THREE EGYPTIAN AUTHORS

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September 11th, 1989

a thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

# ABSTRACT

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| UNIVERSITY: | McGILL UNIVERSITY |
| DEPARTMENT: | INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES |
| DEGREE: | MASTER OF ARTS |
| DATE: | SEPTEMBER 11TH, 1989 |
| TITLE· | CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE EGYPTIAN AUTHORS. |
| AUTHOR: | PATRICE C. BRODEUR |
| PROBLEM: | WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION AND THE ISLAMIC STUDY OF RELIGION? |
| HYPOTHESIS: | ISLAMIC TRADITION PROVIDES THE HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK TO MAKE SENSE OF NON-ISLAMIC RELIGIONS; SCIENCE REMAINS SUBORDINATE TO ISLAMIC FAITH. |
| OBJECTIVES: | TO UNDERSTAND HOW THREE CONTEMPORARY MUSLIMS INTERPRET THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS; TO ASSESS THEIR USE OF THE METHODS AVAILABLE IN *RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT*. |
| METHODS: | COMPARATIVE, PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL. |

RESULTS:

Despite significant differences in the <u>why</u>, <u>how</u> and <u>what</u> of their interpretations of religions, our three authors (Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz and Aḥmad Shalabī) undertand religions, and in Dirāz's case the religious phenomenon in general, through categories specific to an Islamic worldview. Their use of Western scientific methods to apprehend the study of religion is not systematic. It varies from Abū Zahrah's limited use to Shalabī's exuberant use, both being highly subservient to polemical intentions. Only Dirāz shows familiarity and appreciation for scientific methods, without however suscribing to the epistemology of science which underlies them. The resulting relationship between the scientific study of religion and the Islamic study of religion, as epitomized in the fusion of my own commitments to the former and my authors' commitments to the latter, proves ultimately irreconcilable. Our respective epistemologies remain answerable to different centres of authority; the subjective self in the first instance and the objectified God, *Allāh*, in the second.

# RESUME

UNIVERSITE:  McGILL

DEPARTEMENT:  INSTITUT D'ETUDES ISLAMIQUES

GRADE:  MAITRISE

DATE:  LE 11 SEPTEMBRE 1989

TITRE:  APPROCHES MUSULMANES CONTEMPORAINES
DE L'ETUDE DES RELIGIONS:
UNE ANALYSE COMPARATIVE
DE TROIS AUTEURS EGYPTIENS.

AUTEUR:  PATRICE C. BRODEUR

PROBLEME:  QU'ELLE EST LA RELATION ENTRE
L'ETUDE SCIENTIFIQUE DES RELIGIONS ET
L'ETUDE ISLAMIQUE DES RELIGION?

HYPOTHESE:  LA TRADITION ISLAMIQUE FOURNIT UN
CONTEXTE HERMENEUTIQUE QUI DONNE
UN SENS AUX RELIGIONS NON-ISLAMIQUES;
LA SCIENCE DEMEURE ASSUJETTIE
A LA FOI ISLAMIQUE.

METHODES:  COMPARATIVE, PHENOMENOLOGIQUE ET
HERMENEUTIQUE.

RESULTATS:

Malgré des différences significatives dans le pourquoi, le comment et le quoi du contenu de leurs interprétations des religions, nos trois auteurs (Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz et Aḥmad Shalabī) comprennent les religions, et dans le cas de Dirāz le phénomène religieux en général, à travers des catégories spécifiques à une vision islamique du monde. Leurs utilisations des méthodes scientifiques occidentales pour aborder l'étude des religions n'est pas systématique. Elles varient de l'emploi limité qu'en fait Abū Zahrah à l'emploi exubérant qu'en fait Shalabī, les deux modes d'emploi étant assujettis à leurs intentions polémiques. Seul Dirāz démontre une familiarité et une appréciation pour les méthodes scientifiques, sans qu'il souscrive toutefois à l'épistémologie de la science qui les souligne. En fin d'analyse, la relation qui résulte entre l'étude scientifique des religions et l'étude islamique des religions, charactérisée par la fusion entre mon propre engagement à l'égard du premier et celui de mes auteurs à l'égard du second, se veut irréconciliable. Nos épistémologies respectives répondent à différents centres d'autorité: le soi subjectif dans le premier cas, et le Dieu objectifié, *Allāh*, dans le second.

# PREFACE

The present thesis has been the result of a combined interest for Islam and method-ology in the study of religion. This interest developed in Canada and in the Middle-East as a result of much interactions with Muslims, historians of religions and Islamicists here and there. The process of understanding one another across cultures has often been challenging, to the extent where hermeneutical philosophy came to play an important role in providing me with some intellectual understanding at the process of communication and interpretation across cultures, in short, enlightening the process of dialogue. This thesis hopes to provide to its readers some new information on the writings of three contemporary Egyptian Muslims. To my knowledge, five out of the seven books under analysis here have not been studied before. Although these three authors' contributions do not reveal much new information in the field of Islamic studies or in the history of religions, I believe that the application to this body of material of methods dear to historians of religions in combination with new developments in philosophical hermeneutics constitute an original endeavour, however incomplete or unfounded some of this thesis' results might prove to be.

Throughout this thesis, the transliteration system of the Institute of Islamic Studies of McGill University has been followed. But in the case of few well known Arabic words, such as '*islām*', the English spelling has been kept., thus writing 'Islam'. As for calendar years, two systems have been used: the Islamic counting, abbreviated as H. for *hijrah*, and the modern secular counting of Before Common Era and Common Era, abbreviated respectively to BCE and CE.

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# 1. __INTRODUCTION__

The present thesis revolves around two questions. How do contemporary Muslims understand the study of religion? Do they make use of the science of religion? The analysis of seven books on the study of religion, written by three contemporary Egyptian Muslims, will constitute the first dimension of this thesis. These books will be compared to the standards developed in the Western scientific study of religion. The second dimension will focus on the relationship between the science of religion (i.e. *Religions-wissenschaft*) and the Islamic study of religion. Both levels are intertwined constantly, as evidenced by this thesis' underlying problem, hypothesis, objectives and methods.

## 1.1 THE PROBLEM

From the time of the Enlightenment Religionswissenschaft has been operating with Western categories in the study of all religions of the world [...].[1]

This statement recurs, in different forms, in the works of several contemporary scholars[2]. It points to the Enlightenment as the formative period out of which later emerged the modern critical study of religion, whereby religion is apprehended like any other object of inquiry along scientific lines. This formative period occurred in the West, and it was principally Western Christian scholars who participated in it creatively. The same Enlightenment experience has underlain the field of *Religionswissenschaft* since its inception too. The trend still continues as most scholars in the field of *Religionswissenschaft* are from the West.

In view of the fact that the Enlightenment is <u>not</u> a formative period implicitly operative for Muslims, there follows a number of questions. Can we assume that the scientific norms developed out of the specific Western historicity are necessarily applicable to other religio-cultural contexts, such as Islamic Egypt? Are we not facing a hidden intellectual imperialism if we expect Muslims to use our scientific methods of analyzing religions? In short, is there a place for the scientific study of religion in contemporary Islam? If so, then what is it for contemporary Muslims? If not, do Muslims rely exclusively on their own pool of historical approaches to the study of religions? Indeed,

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[1]      J. Kitagawa Ed., The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 22.

[2]      W. C. Smith, Towards a World Theology, (London: Macmillan, and Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 124-125.    Jacques Waardenburg, Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research, 2 Vols., (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 7. The omnipresent Western factor in the study of religion is beginning to be challenged though, as can be seen in Frank Whaling's "The Study of Religion in a Global Context," Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion, Vol. 1, (Berlin: Mouton, 1983), 391-443.    Charles H. Long, "The History of the History of Religions," A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions, Ed. Charles J. Adams, (New York: The Free Press, 1977, second edition), 469.

there is no doubt that Muslims can choose from a rich tradition of historical interpretations of a number of religions:

> There is general agreement among historians of the history of religions that Islamicate civilization produced the greatest pre-modern historical studies of world religions. Indeed, Western scholarly approbation of this literature has been sustained and enthusiastic, based on the observation that that historical science was pioneered by Muslims.[3]

All these questions point towards our core problem: the relationship between the Western scientific study of religions and the Islamic study of religions. Both traditions may seem to have developed in isolation of one another, at different periods of human history. Yet both are now clearly in contact with one another, in confrontation for most, in harmony for a few, but certainly in a creative tension for both sides. It is precisely this tension which challenges us to seek anew the roots of the origins of the study of religions. A closer examination of these roots might reveal a key element in the incongruous nature of the relationship between the science of religion and Islamic Studies in comparison with the relationship between the science of religion and other religious fields. Indeed, there has been relatively little contact between both fields:

> Eventually, though reluctantly, I came to the conclusion that the main thrust of scholarship in History of Religions in our day has little relevance even little interest, for students of Islam.[4]

But why is this? If Islamicate civilization has witnessed the first serious elaboration of historical studies of world religions, how can it be that there be little interest today in the history of religions for students of Islam?

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[3] Wasserstrom, "Islamicate History of Religions?," _History of Religions_, 27:4(1988), 408. Some examples of Muslim historians of religions include al-Shahrastānī, al-Bīrūnī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Baghdādī, etc.

[4] Charles J. Adams, "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," _The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding_, Ed. J. Kitagawa, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 178.

A closer look at this paradox truly challenges the perceived notion among Western scholars that the discipline of the science of religions began in the West in the second part of the nineteenth century, often conveniently assigned to 1870, the year Friedrich Max Müller delivered his momentous lecture series on "The Introduction to the Science of Religion" in London. Indeed, many major contemporary histories of the history of religions have started with Müller[5]. Such wide agreement reinforces the argument that despite the varying claims of objectivity, especially prevalent among the positivists, the majority of today's historians of the history of religions subconsciously reveal their Western universalist tendencies. This attempt to claim the universal applicability of the science of religion on the one hand and the assigning of the beginnings of the science of religion to nineteenth century Europe may represent a potential contradiction. Firstly, it can easily ignore or minimize the literature from pre-modern periods, such as that of Muslim historians of religions[6], an unavoidable historical reality as Wasserstrom has so clearly articulated. Secondly, in claiming that Müller is the founder of the discipline of *Religionswissenschaft*, these historians have implied that it is through the application of the scientific methods to the area of 'religion' that this discipline of *Religionswissenschaft* was born. This kind of argument is deductive and reductionist, a contradiction of scientific norms of inquiry which prefer inductive inferences to deductive ones[7]. Indeed, the process

[5] Many historians of religions have traced the beginnings of the science of religion to Müller. See Stan Yarian, "The Bedrock of the Humanities: Religion or Science?," Liberal Education, 70:1(1984), 41. Bianchi, The History of Religions, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 66.

[6] The expression 'Muslim historians of religions' does not imply that they were like contemporary historians of religions. Such people as al-Shahrastānī, al-Bīrūnī, al-Baghdādī, etc., were essentially concerned with gathering information. Some comparing was done too, although relatively little among the authors who rejected the polemical approach. As for a systematization of religions as a phenomenon, which is the distinctive nature of *Religionswissenschaft*, it is inexistant. Thus the expression 'Muslim historians of religions' should be understood within the non-Enlightenment Islamic historiographical context of these authors.

[7] In fact there are two schools within the Western sciences: the one which calls for an exclusive process of induction as the sole valid logical means to reach facts; the second which calls for the use of both inductive and deductive logical processes, depending on the nature of the object observed.

of looking for the origins of the science of religion[8] as a field in the influence of science on theological and philosophical inquiries into the nature of religion seems to disregard the possibility that the norms and methods developed in Western science could have been present, at least in part, in other cultural contexts. Thus to start any history of the discipline of the science of religion with Max Müller points to a rather exclusive Western self-reference point[9]. One challenge which still awaits the scholars of the history of religions and of Islamic Studies is the task of clarifying the origins of the study of religion in order to take into account the non-Western writings on the history of religions, such as for example what Wasserstrom has called "the Islamicate history of religions"[10]. This might allow *Religionswissenschaft* to operate beyond the narrow confines of Western categories in the study of all religions of the world.

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[8]     A sociological analysis of the emergence of Islamic historical writings on other religions would probably show the link between the resistance of non-Mulims to conversion to Islam and the obligation for Muslims to start to make sense of why those people oppose Islam and prefer their own religions.   So as long as Islam spread and imposed itself, Muslim thinkers did not worry about studying other faiths.   As the tide began to change, they used either apologetic, polemic or critical methods.   This critical method the Muslims used then helped to highlight their different heterodoxies regarding Islam.   The same phenomenon can be argued for the rise of *Religionswissenschaft* , insofar as it emerged with the growing failure of missionary movements to convert people to Christianity, giving rise to a new set of questions to make sense of this resistance.

[9]     The same problem arises with the discipline of psychology and Freud.   It remains largely unaware of the profound knowledge of psychology present in Buddhism for centuries.

[10]     There may also be other pre-modern periods of historical writings on world religions in civilization other than the modern or Islamic periods.

## 1.2 HYPOTHESIS

The relationship between the Western scientific study of religion and the Islamic study of religion has been characterized by tensions and misunderstandings, such as on the question of the origins of the study of religions. At the heart of the matter, there is variance in the respective allegiance to specific ideals and purposes, as well as in the legitimization of means to reach them. On the one hand, the Western scientific study of religion has paid allegiance to the supreme principle that the system of science[11] is universal. The resulting purpose has been to legitimize this perspective by applying its form (i.e. its methods) to the content of world reality and by finding adherents to follow its path throughout the world. In order to reach the above ideal and purpose, Western scientists have made of reason the ultimate reference. This procedure proved relatively easy as through reason human beings have the capacity to bring coherence to the world by creating logical representations which approximate our experiences[12]. The results become self-validating for the process itself.

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[11]    It might be presumptuous to generalize about the whole of Western science. Indeed, in the philosophy of science, there is a major debate on whether or not it is appropriate to model the study of man on the natural sciences, thus causing a major division within the scientific world as a whole. See Charles Taylor, Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.

[12]    On the revolutionary challenge to the assumption that reason underlies Western science since it provides human consciousness with mirror effects of our world, see Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (London: SCM Press, [1962]). It would be important to remember that reason is not equal to intelligence or mind either. The reasoning process is only one mode human beings use to apprehend reality. This fact implies that a researcher who seeks to understand the nature of a particular phenomenon, in our case 'religion', only through logical reasoning is in fact reducing the nature of that phenomenon to a verbal interpretation which will never be equal to that reality: it will always remain an explanation for it, however plausible it may be. Furthermore, the reasoning process is never empty of a priori elements either, as we shall see later when comparing the meaning of reason for one of our authors and our own meaning for it. This question brings us back to the age old truism, common to all mystical traditions, about the difference between talking about the ultimate and experiencing it: it is impossible truly to express the second in terms of the first. Thus it is important to recognize the purpose for our self-reflexive concerns within Islamic Studies or Religionswissenschaft: we cannot be seeking the truth about 'religion', but only the 'correct' interpretation of 'religion', which necessarily means a variety of possibilities requiring a manifold spectrum of useful methods of inquiry. The necessarily relative nature of interpretation should not be confounded with the absolute nature of religious apprehension: the former reduces all forms of apprehension to logical formulations, however close the content of these formulations might come to that religious apprehension, while the latter corresponds to the

On the other hand, the Islamic study of religion, if it can be characterized as a comprehensive unit at all[13], has payed allegiance to the supreme goal of Islam's universality. The resulting purpose has been to legitimize this perspective through the well-known exercise of mission[14], at all levels of human activities[15], in the hope that more adherents would join in the Islamic community. The means legitimized in the Islamic tradition in order to reach the above ideal and purpose is first and foremost the act of *islām*, submission, to the will of God through faith in the message of Muḥammad, the last prophet, as enshrined in the *Qurʾān*[16]. We are thus faced with radically different worldviews between the scientific study of religion whose center is the thinking human

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truthful reality.   Since the nature of Islamic Studies and *Religionswissenschaft* is necessarily limited to the first, i.e. logical formulations through the use of language, the writings on their respective purpose and methods should thus reflect such limitations through the acknowledgement of both the complexity of the phenomena of 'religion', 'Islam' being one case in particular, and the relative nature of our logical apprehension of them.

[13]   It might be preferable to talk of the study of religions by Muslims rather than the Islamic study of religion.   For one, the word 'Islamic' carries normative implications for Muslims as opposed to the word 'Muslim', since 'Islamic' is often understood according to a person's interpretation of Islam.   For us, the word 'Islamic' encompasses what relates to the word 'Islam' at large, however this word might be defined by Muslims themselves.   Another point is that the expression 'Islamic study of religion' might be confused with the field of Islamic Studies, which includes both Muslims and non-Muslims.   However, to reduce it to the second name would imply an atomized representation insofar as each Muslim person differs in his/her approach to the study of religions.   On the contrary, the use of the first expression, namely the Islamic study of religions, implies the possibility that their cumulative scholarship over the centuries forms a unit of some sort.   If such an implication underlies the use of the expression scientific study of religion, then it would make sense to use a parallel expression for Muslim writings on religions.   Both expressions then carry the same   implications.

[14]   In English, the word 'mission' (at least in a religious context) carries the assumption that human beings go forth to bring an important message to other people about the ultimate meaning of life.   The Latin word 'missio' means the act of sending.   Thus, there is a hidden imposition or patronizing value in the act of sending someone to others.   This procedure seems to deny the possibility that human beings can derive their own meaning to life and take responsiblity for it without outside intervention.   On the contrary, in Arabic, the word for mission, *daʿwah*, implies a call to something, an invitation for someone towards something.   The implication here is one of informing a person about a certain message in the form of an invitation or a call to a higher reality.   The ultimate decision lies with the person invited, thus acknowledging his/her own sense of responsibility.   'Sending' and 'inviting' both imply a relationship between at least two people.   But they   are respectively at two opposite ends on the submission/control spectrum.

[15]   This means not only on the level of physical mission but also on that of intellectual mission, which necessarily involves apologetics and polemics, although it may go far beyond them.

[16]   For a better understanding of the relationship between faith and Islam in the Islamic tradition over time, see W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion: a New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind, (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 115-116.

being and the Islamic study of religions whose center is the human being's submission to the will of God as embodied in the *Qurʾānic* revelation. It should not come as a surprise thus if their relationship is full of tensions: the varying nature of each one's ultimate commitment is probably irreconcilable. It carries us back to the ancient and still unresolved tension between faith and reason[17].

In the face of this situation, the first logical hypothesis concerning the outcome of the relationship between the scientific study of religion and the Islamic study of religion in the case of our three Muslim Egyptian authors is that they remain subservient to their own worldview, whatever the degree of Western influence they might have been subject to[18]. Indeed, their Islamic tradition provides the hermeneutical framework ultimately to make sense of non-Islamic religions. The second hypothesis is that, insofar as our three authors have borrowed tools from the Western scientific study of religion, their usage is circumscribed by the limits defined in the Islamic tradition[19]. In short, their application of Western science remains subordinate to Islamic faith.

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[17]    For a good treatment of this question, see John Hick, The Philosophy of Religion, (Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963), especially chapter 7 on "The Problem of Verification".

[18]    There is the possibility for a Muslim to decide not to believe in the Islamic faith and not to belong to the Islamic cultural milieu either. In this case, the Muslim can no longer be called Muslim, for his personal choice of identity excludes any Islamic elements. The question would then remain as to whether this person still lives in an Islamic area, for it is not only a question of personal choice as a social context also impinges upon a person's worldview, even though it may claim to reject it. Such a process of rejection would itself be coloured by the content to be reflected. And even if that person were to live outside an Islamic context, it still remains uncertain as to whether the person can ever escape totally the formative worldview in which he/she has grown up. An example of such a struggling case is that of Salman Rushdie.

[19]    Obviously, these limits are not fixed. They are themselves subject to change as the Islamic tradition evolves over time.

## 1.3 OBJECTIVES

The two principal objectives of this thesis are linked to our answering the two initial

questions: how do our three contemporary Muslim authors understand the study of

religion? And to what extent do they make use of the science of religion? The answers to

these two questions will probably not reveal new information to historians of religions and

to Islamicists. What might be more original is the process developed to reach those

answers, i.e. the combination of methods utilized to make sense of the problem mentioned

above. This problem is not treated as an object in the traditional way, but rather as a subject

to which I relate as a subject too. Using in part the personal, or dialogic, approach

corresponding to W. C. Smith's methodological concerns, a third objective of this thesis is

indirectly to shed some light on the paradoxical situation which lies at the heart of the

relationship between the scientific study of religion and the Islamic study of religion.

Afterall, the three Muslim Egyptian authors selected for this thesis represent three different

contemporary living links with the Islamic tradition and worldview out of which emerged

the most important pre-modern historical study of religion[20]. An analysis of their works

on various religions and in one case on the phenomenon of religion *per se* will hopefully

help better to understand the present variety of contemporary Muslim approaches to the

study of religions.

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[20]     For a detailed list of the numerous Muslims who wrote about religions other than
Islam in the past, thus creating a movement of historical study of religions, see Guy Monnot,
"Les écrits musulmans sur les religions non-bibliques," Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain
d'Etudes Orientales, 11(1972), 5-48.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

In 1973, Kockelmans identified three main possibilities in the human sciences: the empirical, the descriptive and the hermeneutic[21]. The empirical approach produces systematic knowledge which derives from the observation of facts. This knowledge is often organized into quantitative categories for easier functional deductions. As for the others:

> The phenomenological and hermeneutic systems provide two other contexts of knowledge. The phenomenological (descriptive) approach focuses on the structures of experience, the organizing principles that give form and meaning to the lifeworld, while the hermeneutic (interpretive) approach concentrates on the historical meaning of experience and its developmental and cumulative effects at both the individual and social levels.[22]

These three possibilities in the human sciences are also present in *Religionswissenschaft*[23]. Indeed, methods appropriate to each respective approach have occupied the attention of scholars of religions too, although they may not have been grouped into such a triptych before. Nevertheless, this threefold division is useful for the present thesis as it conveniently synthesizes the three main methods which I have resorted to in order better to achieve this thesis' objectives. And these three methods are: the comparative, the phenomenological and the hermeneutical.

The comparative method refers to the systematic collection of facts for the specific goal of comparing them with one another. This was done throughout the thesis in order better to assess both the content and the context of each author's statements in comparison

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[21] This division is taken from Donald Polkinghorne, Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 201.

[22] *Ibid.*, 203.

[23] For some scholars such as Bijlefeld though, *Religionswissenschaft* includes only the History of Religions and Phenomenology of Religion, whether as two sub-disciplines or as two interrelated approaches within one discipline. See W.A. Bijlefeld, "Islamic Studies within the Perspective of the History of Religions," The Muslim World, 62:1(1972), 1-11.

with one another, as well as the more quantifiable elements such as topics, footnotes and sources which have been presented in tabloid forms.

The phenomenological method[24] consists of the study of the morphology of religious material and of the search for understanding religious phenomena. It also provides the history of religions with a meaning by holding it together and integrating it[25]. The two central concepts of the phenomenological method are *epoché* and the eidetic vision[26]. Our analysis of three Muslims' respective perceptions of religions other than Islam requires the utilization of the concept of *epoché* in particular. The results provide an indirect means to understand one aspect of the religious phenomenon of contemporary Islam. As for the historical method *per se*, so instrumental in Islamic Studies and in *Religionswissenschaft*, it has been integrated into the phenomenological method for the purpose of this essay, in part because our selected authors are contemporaries and in part because of the close interaction between the historical and phenomenological methods[27]. As for the traditional

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[24] Hultkranz and Isambert in particular have doubted whether phenomenology is a method at all. Moreover:"Many scholars recognize that the phenomenological approach makes an important and indispensable contribution to the modern study of religion but it is by no means clear whether phenomenology should be considered an independent or subsidiary discipline to the history of religions in the wider sense, and whether there is a specific phenomenological method or merely a general phenomenological perspective in the study of religious phenomena." From page 7 of the excellent presentation of the latest debates on this question by Ursula King, "Historical and Phenomenological Approaches to the Study of Religion: Some Major Developments and Issues under Debate since 1950," in Frank Whaling, *op. cit.*, especially 100-108.

[25] Quoted from Ursula King, *Ibid.*, 100-101, where Hultkranz writes regarding this last point more specifically: "The strictly regionally limited, specialized historical research has led to an atomization of the history of religions so that it runs the risk of disappearing as an independent discipline or of being swallowed up by parallel anthropological or philological researches. The phenomenology of religion offers a way out of this dilemma by providing a common perspective for all historians of religion and in addition it might provide a framework for the new research which increasingly takes over the place of the old philologically orientated history of religion:[...]".

[26] For a definition of both of these concepts, refer to Whaling, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

[27] In his article mentioned in footnote 21 above, Bijlefeld struggles with the nature of the exact relationship between the history of religion and the phenomenology of religion. Part of the issue has been observed in the attempt to consider one superior to the other, attempts often accompanied by specific ways of defining each approach. Looking at the issue from afar, it seems that the two approaches are inseparable due to their complementarity. It would then be legitimate to emphasize one approach over the other, depending on a researcher's objectives.

philological method also inseparable from any serious research in the field of Islamic

Studies, and not altogether absent from this thesis, it was rather incorporated into the wider

hermeneuticalmethod.

The hermeneutical method, especially in its philosophical description by Gadamer,

explains the process of interpretation within a linguistic framework:

> Interpretation is a mediation or construction between each interpreter's own
> language and the language of the text. The text continues to speak in various ways as it is
> approached by various translators, each of whom has his own lifeworld language.[28]

There is no doubt that Gadamer's specific example of the translator's implication in the

process of interpretation is at work throughout this thesis as much translation of our three

Muslim Egyptians occurs. But certainly the most recurrent use of the hermeneutical method

in this thesis appears in connection with section three on intentionality. At the basis of the

method used in that section is Betti's own interpretation of hermeneutics in which

"understanding is the reconstruction of the intentions of the author"[29]. But in this thesis as a

whole, the usage of the hermeneutical method, which is understood in various ways by

different scholars, at times stresses a more Gadamerian interpretation (i.e. emphasis on the

subjective) and at other times, a more Betti'an one (i.e. emphasis on the possibility to reach

objective understanding). The results should not necessarily be contradictory, as each

interpretive style in the hermeneutical method, should be judged according to the usefulness

of the results obtained for the advancement of one's understanding of this thesis' overall

problem.

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[28] Polkinghorne, *op. cit.*, 226.
[29] *Ibid.*, 229. Betti's interpretation of hermeneutics comes very close to Waardenburg's 'new-style' phenomenology.

The process of interpreting and understanding[30] results in knowledge. For Polkinghorne, "knowledge is understood to be the best understanding that we have been able to produce thus far, not a statement of what is ultimately real"[31]. From this philosophical position, Polkinghorne asserts that:

> in a postpositivist understanding of science there is no correct method to follow. Science is not seen as an activity of following methodological recipes that yield acceptable results. Science becomes the creative search to understand better, and it uses whatever approaches are responsive to the particular questions and subject matters addressed. Those methods are acceptable which produce results that convince the community that the new understanding is deeper, fuller, and more useful than the previous understanding.[32]

Thus in the science of religion, the process of attempting to reach some higher degree of understanding, which results in more knowledge, need not be measured according to one precise methodology. Rather, the plurality of methods developed for the study of religion reflects the natural complexity of our object of concern and should be welcomed as a sign of vitality. It should not be forced into a competition of claims as to which method is the most valid at all times. The purpose of methodological discussions should remain, on the one hand, the analysis of the context in which each method is most appropriate and yields valuable results and, on the other hand, the examination of the means by which these methods can, through their interrelatedness, bring greater meaningful cohesion to the mass of results which is growing exponentially.

This interactional process of understanding and interpreting through the use of various methods underlies my efforts in this thesis. On the one hand, I, the present writer, seek to know how my own tradition of interpreting the phenomena of religion -i.e. *Religionswissenschaft*- is perceived and utilized in a non-Western context such as contemporary Islamic Egypt. On the other, there is a heterogeneous body of Muslim

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[30]    For a detailed analysis of the notion of understanding, or *Verstehen* in German, see D. Polkinghorne, *op.cit.,* 215-220.
[31]    *Ibid.,* 2.
[32]    *Ibid.,* 3.

writers who have interpreted the phenomena of religion throughout the centuries. This

preliminary binary interaction between me and three of those Muslim writers is admittedly

uneven[33]. Moreover, it is not only a question of understanding how Muslims have

interpreted the phenomena of religion (Betti's point of view). For this attempt at

understanding them is itself influenced by my conceptual *a prio.·*. In order to confront this

unavoidable limitation and bring the possible pitfalls into the open, I acknowledge from the

start my own situation in the interactional process of understanding, and briefly explain the

conceptual framework which forms my own historicity. Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' can

thus become more visible to the reader.

My own historicity is marked by an intentional attempt to put in practice what W. C.

Smith has called "universal, trans-cultural, corporate, critical self-consciousness" on the

one hand, and by a "polycontextual and multiperspectival worldview"[34] on the other. So

my own intentionality is closer to hermeneutical concerns. But in the process of developing

these concerns, at least two potential dangers may surface. The first danger would be to

impose upon the object studied (whether 'religion' in general or 'Islam through our three

Muslims' in particular) certain criteria which correspond only to my own framework in the

first place: for example, to argue that Muslims should follow my Western scientific

methods for the study of religions. The results emerging from research with such

expectations might prove useful to me but irrelevant to my Muslim object/subject of study.

The second danger would be to avoid the interactional reality which has always existed

between the abstracted notions of the 'West' and the 'Islamic world'. If materialized, the

results of both of these dangers might only reinforce the view dividing two groups whose

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[33] The reverse situation is not taken into consideration at all- i.e. Muslims analyzing how Westerners have perceived and utilized the Islamic tradition of interpreting the phenomena of religion throughout the centuries.

[34] Edward Hughes, paraphrasing W.C. Smith, defines corporate self-consciousness as "a method designed to transcend the subject/object dichotomy by recognizing the unique status of a subject/subject relationship." Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Theology for the World, (London: SCM Press LTD, 1986), 150.

boundaries have always overlapped in any case. It is thus important to remain aware of these dangers to which I may fall prey at times. The reader will determine whether I have succeeded in my intentions or remained unaware of even more limitations inherent to the methodological approach I have used to enlighten this thesis' problem.

The structure of this thesis essentially follows four simple divisions. The first division focuses on each one of our three authors' historicity, and then draws parallels and contrasts among them. The next three sections focus on the why-how-what of knowledge transmission. Why is knowledge transmitted? How is it transmitted? And what kind of factual knowledge is transmitted? Section 3 looks at the intentionality of each author. Section 4 analyses their respective methods on the basis of their own claims, definitions and usage of sources. Finally section 5 takes a close look at the factual descriptions of the various religions upon which each author has focused. The following conclusion will then tie together the results of the four previous sections with the theoretical problem formulated in this introduction in order to assess our hypotheses. The results will hopefully shed some light on how three contemporary Egyptian Muslims have understood the study of religion and its science, as well as on what their respective understandings imply for the relationship between, on the one hand, the science of religion and the Islamic study of religion and, on the other, the science of religion and Islamic studies.

## 2. THREE   SOCIO-HISTORICAL   PORTRAITS

In the present study, three Muslim Egyptian intellectuals will be studied: Muḥammad Abū Zahrah (1898-1973 ?), ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz (1894-1958) and Aḥmad Shalabī (b. circa 1925). I will focus on seven works of theirs which were written between c. 1940 and 1965, a twenty-five year span. The books were conceived and first published in Egypt, with the exception of Aḥmad Shalabī's which were first elaborated in Indonesia. After a brief overview of the Egyptian intellectual milieu in which the authors grew up, there will be a short biography of each author so as to clarify their respective historical contexts. Finally, parallels and contrasts will emerge, clarifying the significance of each author's personal versus shared historicity, as well as providing important historical elements relevant to the later analysis of their respective works.

## 2.1 TWENTIETH CENTURY EGYPT: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The course of history has brought twentieth century Egyptians into contact with Europe in an unprecedented way. Politically, the 1798 Napoleonic occupation marked the beginning of a shift from Ottoman to European domination. Egypt became more and more entangled in the geo-politics of European powers engaged in a worldwide colonial race. Even the official end of the British protectorate on February 28th 1922 was not ratified until 1956. The British high commissioner, renamed British ambassador after 1922, had a preponderant influence on internal matters. The administration kept several British officers, especially at the head of the police forces[1]. During the Second World War, the British regained military control over Egypt, a vital strategic position for Great Britain. Following the war, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 proved a shock to the Arabs who accused the English and the Western powers of continuing their imperialist policies against the Arab nation. It was only in 1952, with ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's *coup d'état* of July 23rd, that Egypt's foreign occupation came to a *de facto* political end.

In conjunction with political imperialism, British economic interests took over Egypt's main sources of revenues: the Suez canal and the cotton trade. Any modernization attempt had to be achieved through the purchase of British or European technology and expertise: an expensive dependency for the Egyptian economy. The necessary transformations to modernize Egypt which began under Muḥammad ʿAlī's reign (1805-1849), required first and foremost Western training. In the course of the nineteenth century, many Egyptian missions were sent to study in different European countries. In turn, many Europeans, especially Greeks and Italians, began to settle in Egypt, particularly during the cotton trade boom of the eighteen sixties. The duo, modernization-technology, which the

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[1]     Jean-Pierre Derriennic, <u>Le Moyen Orient au XXè Siècle</u>, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1980), 81.

Europeans had brought into Egypt pushed many Egyptians to advocate the implementation of an European school system and curriculum, the basis of which had been laid in 1836 by Muhammad ᶜAlī[2]. Greater trade with the West, which was mostly controlled by Europeans, slowly turned a minority of Muslims toward the obvious: the acquisition of Western education meant greater opportunities for the future. This Egyptian demand consolidated Western education within the *élite* of the newly transforming society. By the early twentieth century, the old religious or *kuttāb* school system and the Western institutions formed two distinct systems. And at a higher level: " The introduction of a new kind of training College for the Western Sciences at the same time maintaining the *dār al-ᶜulūm* resulted in the creation of a gap between the two cultures, the Islamic and the Western which was to widen gradually [...]"[3].

So by the early twentieth century Egyptian society was in full transformation, from Alexandria southward and from the *élite* downward. These transformations were far from being uniform. The rising gap between a minority striving to emulate the West, most often politically aligned with the nationalist forces, and a majority rooted in a traditional Islamic world-view, whether pro-monarchy or pro-Islamic unity (*al-ikhwān al-muslimūn*), has foreshadowed the major social issue of twentieth century Egypt: tradition versus modernity. This tension has underlain the life of our three authors, to which we shall now turn, and it has played a central role in the formation of their world-views and their subsequent choice of methods.

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[2]      Georgie D. M. Hyde, Education in Modern Egypt: Ideals and Realities, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 2.

[3]      J. Heyworth-Dunne, An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt, (London: Luzac & Co., 1938), 428.

## 2.2 MUḤAMMAD ABŪ ZAHRAH: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Muḥammad Abū Zahrah was born on March 29th 1898 in al-Maḥallat al-Kubrā, a town in the middle of the Nile delta region of Egypt. Of a distinguished family (his uncle had the nickname *Shaykh al-Maḥallah*), Abū Zahrah began his education in the *kuttāb* and local primary school, where he began to memorize the *Qurʾān* and to learn the rudiments of reading and writing. He then moved on to a higher school where he completed the memorization of the *Qurʾān*, began studies of the Arabic language and learned some rudiments of mathematics and geography. At 15 years old, Abū Zahrah entered the al-Aḥmadī mosque in Ṭanṭā, an institutional branch of the Cairene al-Azhar[4]. Three years later, he was invited by his former teacher, Shaykh al-Fāḍil al-Aḥmadī al-Dhawāhirī, to join him in al-Azhar in Cairo. In 1916, Abū Zahrah entered the School of *sharīʿah* with the highest grades on the entrance exam. This school, first conceived of by the famous reformer Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905), was in fact founded by his pupil Aḥmad Saʿd Fatḥī Zaghlūl (1860-1927), also a graduate of al-Azhar. Its first director ʿAṭif Bāshā Barakāt, exerted a formative influence upon its students, including Abū Zahrah[5].

After graduating in 1925, Abū Zahrah did a year of training in legal defense, during which he continued to study on his own. He passed the *dār al-ʿulūm* diploma in 1927. The same year, he was appointed to teach Islamic law and Arabic language at the preparatory level in *dār al-ʿilm* and in the School of *sharīʿah*, where he remained for three years. He then taught another two and a half years at public high schools. From 1933 to 1942, he held an appointment at the College of *uṣūl al-dīn* first as teacher of rhetoric, then of history

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[4] Muḥammad ʿAbduh studied in al-Aḥmadī mosque in Ṭanṭā from 1862 to 1866. This mosque has been under al-Azhar's administration since 1896. See Bayard Dodge, Al-Azhar: A Millenium of Muslim Learning, (Washington D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1961), 129 and 135.

[5] Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muḥammad Abū Zahrah: imām ʿaṣrihi* , (Cairo: dār al-iʿtiṣām, 1984), 25-26.

of religions, denominations and sects. It is during this period that Muḥammad Abū Zahrah wrote "Lectures on Comparative Religions" and "Lectures on Christianity"[6]. In 1934, he accepted a further appointment in the College of Law to teach rhetoric. In 1935 he was promoted to teach Islamic law. Further promotions saw him move from teacher, assistant professor, chair professor, director of the sharīʿah department until he reached retirement age in 1958. Despite orders from the College of Law, Abū Zahrah refused to stop teaching, even if it did go against the Sultan's directives[7]! He eventually took up teaching at the new Institute of Higher Arabic Studies founded as a branch of the Arab States University. He participated in the founding of the Association of Islamic Studies and that of the Institute of Islamic Studies in which he was appointed professor and director of its sharīʿah department. Finally, he was elected member of the Islamic Research Society of al-Azhar in February 1962. In 1963, he continued to teach Islamic law and sharīʿah at the College of Business Administration in al-Azhar University. His last publication dates from 1973.

Abū Zahrah's literary contribution spans a wide spectrum, from theological academic writings to more popular writings[8]. In this almost encyclopeadic production, a number of works stand out as more reflective of Abū Zahrah's main concerns and expertise. After writing on rhetoric and the history of religions in his early academic years, Abū Zahrah turned principally to Islamic jurisprudence. He wrote a major work on the different Islamic schools, as well as on eight major Islamic figures in the development of Islamic jurisprudence[9]. He also produced a general introduction to this field as well as another book on its problematic features. Furthermore, Abū Zahrah contributed a three volume work on "The last of the Prophets", another on the Qurʾān entitled "The Great Miracle". In his numerous popular works, the emphasis moved to a more apologetic description of some

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[6]    Ibid., 31.
[7]    Ibid.   Reported without any references.
[8]    For a detailed list of Muḥammad Abū Zahrah's publications, refer to section 7.1.
[9]    These figures include: Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik Ibn Anas, al-Shāfiʿī, Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Imām Zayd, Ibn Taymīyah, Ibn Ḥazm and al-Imām al-Ṣādiq.

current central Islamic themes[10]. In short, Abū Zahrah's principal literary output reflects a life long concern with normative *sunnī* legalism.

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[10] Some of these themes include: contract of marriage and inheritance, the call (*da'wah*) to Islam, Islamic society, family planning, Islamic war (*jihād*) in Islam, Islamic unity, etc. See section 7.1.

## 2.3 ᶜABD-ALLĀH DIRĀZ : A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz[11] was born in 1894 in an Egyptian village near Alexandria. In 1905, he started to study at a religious institute in Alexandria. By 1912, he received his secondary school certificate from al-Azhar, which had then implemented some laws of reform (in 1895-1896) but still remained independent from the government[12]. In 1916, he received the al-Azhar equivalent of a doctorate degree, the *shahādatal-ᶜālamīyah* [13]. In between, he had learned French and, after his graduation, he was offered a teaching position at the Lycée Français du Caire which he turned down. While he continued his studies privately, he taught at various schools until, in 1928, he started teaching at the College of *uṣūl al-dīn* in Cairo.

In 1936, ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz received a scholarship, together with two other Egyptians[14], to pursue his doctoral studies in France. He left for Paris with his wife and ten children (five boys and five girls). They remained there for twelve years without returning once to Egypt. Even the war years were spent in Paris, with all the threats which German occupation posed for Egyptians due to the British presence in Egypt. Despite the very difficult situation during these years, ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz never stopped attending

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[11] Most of the following biographical information comes from an interview with the daughter and son-in-law of ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz, Dr. and Mrs. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Badawī. It took place in Alexandria on December 18th 1986. Dr. Badawī used to be head of the department of sociology at the University of Alexandria.

[12] Bayard Dodge, Al-Azhar: A Millenium of Muslim Learning, (Washington D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1961), 134.

[13] This diploma later became the equivalent of the current North American bachelor's degree after certain laws were promulgated by King Fuᶜād the First in 1930 and 1933. See Dodge, *Ibid.* 136.

[14] The two other Egyptians were Shaikh al-Fahhām and Shaikh al-Tāj also from al-Azhar. The three formed the Fuʾād the First mission in Paris. During the German occupation of Paris, it was impossible for the three Egyptians to receive their grants from the Egyptian government. It was Massignon and other French Orientalists who often provided the necessary funds for the three Egyptian students and family to survive and pursue their studies. This information was provided by Dr. Albert Nader who was also pursuing his doctoral studies at La Sorbonne at that time. See also the first page dedication in ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz's two published thesis, *Initiation au Koran* and *La Morale du Koran.*

classes at La Sorbonne. He first obtained a *licence* in philosophy while continuing his own research. He also gained a working knowlege of English. Finally, after successfully defending two theses on December 15th, 1947, ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz was awarded his doctorate degree with *mention très honorable.* The examiners were Louis Massignon, Évariste Lévi-Provençal and Lessein. He wrote two theses: " *Initiation au Koran: exposé historique, analytique et comparatif* " as well as " *La Morale du Koran* "[15].

ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz's return to Egypt in 1948 marked the beginning ot a new period. He began to teach for the first time a course on the History of Religions, at Fuᵓād the First University[16]. It was taught in the faculty of literature for students from the department of philosophy, concentrating in sociology[17]. He was later appointed to al-Azhar and soon delegated to *dār al-ᶜulūm* to teach comparative religion. In 1949, he became a member of the al-Azhar academy. In 1953, he was chosen to be a member of the government's High Committee for Policies in Education. He also joined the High Council for Radio Diffusion, where he began the radio broadcasting of a weekly quarter of an hour presentation on morals and ethics[18]. He also became a member of the Supreme Council of the ᶜUlamāᵓ at Cairo. In January 1958, he represented al-Azhar, together with Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, at the Pan-Islamic Conference held in Lahore, Pakistan. He delivered a lecture on the theme: "Islam's Attitude Towards and Relations with other Faiths". He died soon afterwards, during the conference itself[19].

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[15] Both theses were published in 1951 in Paris, at the *Presses Universitaires de France.*
[16] First founded in 1925 under the name Egyptian University, Fuᵓād the First University was later renamed University of Cairo in 1952. See Dodge, *Ibid.,*143.
[17] ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz, *al-dīn,* ([Cairo]: [?], [1952]), from the preface.
[18] These radio presentations were compiled in a posthumous work edited by Dr. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Badawī under the title *dustūr al-ikhlāq al-Qurᵓān,* (Beyrout: *dār al-buḥūth al-ᶜilmīyah,* 1973).
[19] A collection of a good number of the papers presented at the International Islamic Colloquium held at the University of Panjab, Lahore, from December 29th 1957 till January 8th 1958, is available at the library of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, Montréal, Canada. See also Bayard Dodge, "The International Islamic Colloquium," The Muslim World, 48:2(1958), 170-173. See page 173 for a special reference to the untimely death of ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz. There is a fuller report also by Bayard

ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz wrote in three major fields: Islamic ethics, Islamic law and philosophy[20]. According to jurists, his *magnus opus* is: *al-nabāʾ al-ʿadhīm* (The Great Revelation). Also important is *al-mukhtār fī al-ḥadīth* (Selection of Traditions). Through his publications, many of which are general introductions, and through his social involvement in Egyptian society, ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz portrayed his deep rootedness in Islam and his openness to learning about and integrating Western knowledge. His written contributions reflect the merging of two cultural legacies, a tendency not unlike that started by Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889-1973), twenty years earlier.

Dodge, "The International Islamic Colloquium: 1958," The Muslim World, 48:3(1958), 192-204, especially 199-202 for references to the paper given by ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz.
[20]    For a detailed list of ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz's works, refer to section 7.2.

## 2.4 AḤMAD SHALABĪ: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Aḥmad Shalabī was born in the early nineteen twenties in the village of ʿĀlim near Abū Ḥammād in the Eastern province of Egypt[21]. His father, a local well-to-do private tradesman, died when Aḥmad was only four years old. The inheritance was enough for his mother to keep supporting Aḥmad and his sister independently. Like the other village children, his education began at the *kuttāb* where he memorized the *Qurʾān*, learned the rudiments of writing, counting and *Qurʾān* recitation. Upon completion of this first basic stage, rather than picking up his father's trade, Aḥmad decided to attend the preparatory school in the town of al-Zaqāzīq[22]. After the preparatory level, he pursued his studies in *dār al-ʿulūm* at the University of Cairo[23]. After graduation, he pursued a doctorate program at Cambridge University in England. In 1952, he completed his thesis entitle: "History of Muslim Education". It was later published in 1954. While at Cambridge, he studied comparative religions and more particularly the works of Ibn Ḥazm, al-Bīrūnī, Shahrastānī and Masʿūdī with such professors as Arthur John Arberry, Bernard Lewis and Bertram Thomas. Shalabī acknowledged that he relied heavily on these early Muslim precursors of comparative religions in the Islamic world in his later publications on this topic. In 1955, Shalabī was delegated by the University of Cairo and the Muslim Congress to become professor of Islamic Studies in the University of Indonesia. Then he was appointed director of the United Arab Republic Cultural Center in Jakarta. While in Indonesia, he

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[21]    Most of the following information comes from Aḥmad Shalabī's autobiography, *riḥlat ḥayyāh* (Cairo: *maktabat al-nahḍat al-miṣrīyah*, 1973), 27-31. Aḥmad Shalabī's birthdate is not given in that autobiography nor was it obtained at the interview which he accorded to this author on December 16th, 1986, which took place at Shalabī's appartment in al-Maʿādī, Cairo.

[22]    This preparatory school in al-Zaqāzīq was called *al-maʿhad al-dīnī* (the Religious Institute). It was first affiliated with al-Azhar. Then it has come under full al-Azhar jurisdiction at least since 1930. See Dodge, *Ibid.*, 149.

[23]    *Dār al-ʿulūm* had previously been attached to al-Azhar since 1925. At this time, al-Azhar's finances did not escape this process of greater centralization either. Between the two World Wars, the finances of al-Azhar were gradually removed from the private sector to government authorities. In 1952, al-Azhar became totally funded through the Egyptian government. See Dodge, *Ibid.*, 146.

began delivering lectures on comparative religions. He worked with such people as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasbī, Professor Ḥankah and Dr. Muktī ʿAlī. It would seem that, upon leaving Indonesia in 1961, Shalabī left behind him a new interest for comparative religions[24]. But Shalabī also added that: "Comparative religions is very useful in Egypt [too]. We have to understand these people, their religion and we need to have full respect for Jewish people and Christians as well as [promote a] deep and sincere study [of them]"[25]. So upon his return to Egypt, Shalabī began teaching, among other subjects, comparative religions at *dār al-ʿulūm* in Cairo (some twelve thousand students). He is currently director of its Faculty of Islamic Studies (three thousand students)[26].

Aḥmad Shalabī truly writes on an encyclopaedic scale[27]. To mention but a few of his publications, there are: "Encyclopaedia of Islamic History" (10 volumes, 3rd edition), "Encyclopaedia of Islamic Institutions and Civilization" (10 volumes, the last volume being an autobiography), and "Islamic Library for all matters" (100 monographs divided into 6 groups). He also wrote three books on the Arabic language for non-Arabic speakers, educational books such as his famous "How to write a research or thesis", now at more than its twentieth edition. Finally, he either wrote or had several books of his translated into Indonesian. He also published in English: "Belief-Legislation and Morals" as well as "History of Education in Egypt", which was his Cambridge doctoral thesis. Two threads seem to tie all these subjects together: history (especially contemporary) and education (relevance of Islam to the contemporary world). This is not surprising since Aḥmad Shalabī wrote his doctorate thesis on the history of Muslim education.

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[24] Among some of Aḥmad Shalabī's followers, we may find a certain Masʿūdī in Indonesia and a certain Aḥmad Ibn Sukkār at the National Publication House in Singapore. Aḥmad Shalabī added in the interview with this author that there are now new professors teaching comparative religions too. He named two of them: Safī al-Dīn and Raʿūf Shalabī.

[25] From the December 16th, 1986 interview in Cairo.

[26] Aḥmad Shalabī said that several of his students in *dār al-ʿulūm* were currently working under his supervision on new publications in the field of comparative religions.

[27] For a detailed list of Aḥmad Shalabī's publications, see section 7.3.

## 2.5 PARALLELS AND CONTRASTS

There are several parallels among Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz and Aḥmad Shalabī, especially in terms of social background, education and main occupation. They can also be differentiated through several contrasts, such as access to foreign languages, exposure to travels and general attitudes toward the West. Despite the relative lack of detailed biograhical information about each author, it remains possible to outline some of the main features of the above parallels and contrasts. These will enlighten our three authors' shared historicity and differentiations, thus providing important elements to explain, in subsequent chapters, their choices of topic, methodology, rhetoric and style.

The social backgrounds of our three authors reflect more parallels than contrasts. ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz and Muḥammad Abū Zahrah were born at a close interval to one another, at the end of last century, while Aḥmad Shalabī was born a generation later, in the early nineteen twenties. All three grew up in more rural areas, whether in villages or a town, then yet little influenced by Western ways of life[28]. Indeed, Dirāz and Shalabī were raised in small villages, while Abū Zahrah grew up in a small town in the middle of the Nile delta. Although Dirāz's family background within that small village is unknown, it might be assumed that it would have been similar to that of Shalabī insofar as both of them were able to leave home in their early adolescence to pursue their studies. In Shalabī's case, this implied a certain relative freedom from financial responsibility towards his family. Shalabī came from a family of petit tradesman with some small land ownership, thus relatively wealthy within the context of agrarian Egypt. As for Abū Zahrah, his family seems also to have been of some importance if the uncle had become the *Shaykh al-Maḥallah*. Accordingly, it would seem that our three authors enjoyed some degree of financial ease

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28    Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *al-ʿayyām* (Cairo: *dār al-maʿārif*, [1952]), vols. 1-2.

which allowed them to pursue their studies. But only in the case of Abū Zahrah is it clear that his family background predisposed him toward long term religious studies.

The second and most important element of cohesion among our three authors is their early years of education. All three of them passed through the *kuttāb* system. In their early teens, they left home for a better religious educational institution: Abū Zahrah to Ṭanṭā; Dirāz to Alexandria; and Shalabī to al-Zaqāzīq. All three thus entered institutions linked to the al-Azhar network of religious schools. Clearly, by the time they obtained their secondary diplomas, all three had probably received a very similar traditional *sunnī* religious education outside the pale of the more modern school system established by Muḥammad ʿAlī in 1836. Even Shalabī who went through the system some twenty years later seems to have received the same essential training[29]. The relatively similar family background and basic religious education of our three authors seem to indicate a strong traditional Egyptian Islamic context. This certainly contributed to a high degree of shared historicity among Dirāz, Abū Zahrah and Shalabī.

In addition to this formative period during which the same traditional Islamic worldview was acquired, all three authors further specialized in Islamic Studies, whether at al-Azhar in the case of Dirāz or at dār al-ʿulūm for Abū Zahrah and Shalabī. Clearly, these institutions were not monolithic in terms of how their members interpreted the inherited Islamic tradition in the context of a rapidly changing Cairo and Alexandria confronted with Western technology and values. There existed several currents often dichotomized into pro and contra reform efforts[30]. But more importantly, these reforms were always prey to the

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[29] The al-Zaqāzīq mosque joined al-Azhar in 1930, while the ones of Alexandria and Ṭanṭā joined in 1896. The *curriculum* remained essentially the same. For the content of this *curriculum*, see Bayard Dodge, *Ibid.*, 208 and 211-212.

[30] This process of modernization at al-Azhar started in 1895-1896, with the first laws of reform for which Muḥammad ʿAbduh and the al-Azhar rector Shaikh Ḥassūnah al-Nawāwī were instrumental.

political rivalries among monarchists, nationalists and supporters of the growing Muslim Brothers (*al-ikhwān al-muslimūn*), after 1928. Whatever the personal inclinations of our three authors might have been, the fact that all three authors remained within the field of Islamic studies and eventually spent their lives teaching and writing about it speaks eloquently of the strong commitment to Islam and Islamic tradition, however it might have been defined, which our three authors shared. In fact, they have themselves been actors in this constantly changing tradition, contributing in various ways to its contemporary coloring.

Within the context of this shared Islamic Egyptian historicity, which constitutes the foundation for understanding our three authors, it is possible to discern major differentiations. The most obvious one pertains to the graduate studies carried on in Egypt and/or in Europe, the second of which implies an advanced knowledge of a second language. There is also the degree of exposure to the outside world through travelling and working abroad. Finally, and as a result in part of all of the above factors, different concerns emerged as we briefly survey each author's publications.

The greatest factor of differentiation among our three authors remains linked to the place and extent of their respective graduate studies. Dirāz first obtained the *shahādat al-ᶜālamīyah*, the al-Azhar equivalent of a Ph.D., in 1916. Abū Zahrah, after graduating from the College of *sharīᶜah* in 1926 and a year later obtaining the *dār al-ᶜulūm diploma* [31], embarked on a teaching carreer and rapidly started publishing and thus climbing the academic ladder. During this time, Dirāz concentrated on teaching and learning French which made him elligible for an Egyptian government scholarship to embark on a second doctorate in France in 1936. By this time, Shalabī was probably studying towards his first

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[31]     It is not clear how each one of those degrees relates to the other at that period of relatively frequent changes.     Futhermore, since the exact dates of graduation are not available, it remains difficult to give any valid equivalent.

degree at *dār al-ᶜulūm* , which made compulsory the learning of a foreign language, English in Shalabī's case. This later enabled him to begin his doctorate studies in England, about a decade after Dirāz had crossed the Mediterranean. In fact, Shalabī's leaving Egypt at a much younger age than Dirāz, as well as his greater exposure to the Western influences so present in Cairo during the Second World War made the confrontation with the West even more challenging than it had been for Abū Zahrah and Dirāz, a challenge closer to the core of his self-identity. If it remains difficult to measure the extent of such an impact, it is important to be aware of the varying degrees of potential Western influences on our authors. Indeed, both ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz and Aḥmad Shalabī studied abroad for a major length of time (respectively 12 and about 7 years) in order to obtain a doctorate degree. As for Abū Zahrah, he remained in Cairo the major part of his life, connected directly or indirectly to al-Azhar and *dār al-ᶜulūm*, and seemingly without proficient knowledge of a European language. Furthermore, apart from the time spent abroad for study purposes, Shalabī taught in Indonesia for six years. This time spent abroad is much greater than that spent by both Dirāz and Abū Zahrah who sporadically travelled to various conferences, such as the International Islamic Colloquium in Lahore in Pakistan in 1958. Shalabī still continues to travel much, giving classes and advice on Islamic education especially in the gulf states, such as Dubai[32].

Shalabī's broader exposure to the Muslim world's variety demarcates him from the other two authors. This is clearly reflected in the scope of Shalabī's publications. He claims that he is the first Muslim to have written a history of Islam from a truly global perspective and that he is the first Muslim in the contemporary period to revive the tradition of comparative religions which was first founded by Muslims[33]. It seems that Shalabī is at

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[32]     From the December 16th, 1986 interview in Cairo.
[33]     *Ibid.*

once rooted in the Islamic heritage of scholarship and concerned with twentieth century
world reality. In fact, he should be considered as an educationalist historian, insofar as he
attempts to make accessible to a wide audience the fruits of Islamic history. However his
apologetic bent emerges when his concerns for presenting Islamic history and civilization
(1959, 1974) are linked to his concerns for proving the all encompassing and superior
nature of Islam in terms of politics (1964), communism (1976), economics (1964, 1976,
1980), legislation (1976), Islamic social life (1958, 1968), socialism (1966), institutions
(1978), not to mention world religions (1961-1964)[34]. A simple survey of the titles of his
publications reveals an apologetic dialectic insofar as Shalabī juxtaposes to Islam concepts
clearly borrowed from the West. In other words, he presents Islamic responses to Western
phenomena in the light of his own historical interpretation.

In contrast, a similar survey of ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz's publications reveals only two
titles which resonate of apologetics: "Introduction to General International Law in Islam"
and "Interest from the Point of View of Islamic Law". The others, including his two thesis,
concentrate on core Islamic areas, such as *Qurʾān* (1951, 1978), *hadīth* (1978) and ethics
(1950, 1973). Dirāz's works include a strong ethical dimension. It would seem that ethics,
rather than history, constitute Dirāz's major focus of commitment to Islam.

As for Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, his long list of publications reflects a primary
interest in jurisprudence, especially in terms of the major founders of the various legal
schools (*madhāhib* ). He also wrote several major works on a number of more specific
legal issues such as *waqf* (1959), marriage and inheritance (1971), family and birth control
(1976), etc. Apart from jurisprudence *per se*, he wrote three books which stress the

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[34]     The years in parentheses refer to the publication date of the books referred to, in
accordance with the lists of each author's publications found in section 7.    Many of the
publication dates refer to second or later editions, the specific dates of the first edition not
having been found.

relevance of an Islamic society and Islamic unity in our contemporary world (1965, 1965, 1977). All these publications can be divide *grosso modo* into two broad categories: long monographs and lecture notes. Many of Abū Zahrah's titles begin with " Lectures on ...", including his two books on comparative religions and Christianity (194?, 1942). Abū Zahrah reflects the passage from oral transmission to a written form of transmission which is then used by students in the same traditional rote memory fashion[35]. It would then appear that these books of lecture format serve a more specific educational purpose[36]. In this respect, Abū Zahrah's intense involvement with publications for students implies some parallel with Shalabī's concern for educating Muslims of his age at large. But Abū Zahrah's main interest nonetheless remains the revitalization of *sunnī* legalism, making the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh* available to a wider and more literate audience than in the past.

Whether historical, ethical or legal, each focus which Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz and Aḥmad Shalabī has brought to bear on the developments taking place within today's Islamic world, carries with it the historicity of the twentieth century's turbulences. Indeed, in a few decades Egyptians passed from an Islamic centered worldview to often infringing influences from outside ideologies. This process finally culminated in a state of political independence, although marred with military and economic dependencies. How did these rapid changes affect our three authors' interpretations and

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[35]    Dodge, *Ibid.*, 168.

[36]    The distinction between lecture notes and more academically oriented publications seems somewhat inappropriate in the traditional Islamic context out of which Abū Zahrah is writing. This distinction stems from a Western context in which a clear difference is made between academic (thus thoroughly researched and scientific in methodology) publications and teaching tools such as lecture notes (not thoroughly revised and often incomplete for publication standards). The audience to which each type of writing is destined is also considered as different: students versus the academic scientific community. Nevertheless, despite the obvious Western bias involved in making such a distinction in the case of Abū Zahrah's publications, it will become necessary in better defining his hermeneutical context, especially as it will be compared later on with that of Dirāz and Shalabī in which Western influences directly shaped their respective hermeneutics.

visions of Islam? How much did technological advance force our authors to reckon with alien scientific methods in their own work in the history , ethics and legal aspects of Islam? How much of the Western "other" has impinged on their Islamic and Egyptian identities? Why would all three authors, writing from different Islamic perspectives, decide to write on comparative religions? Unfortunately incomplete biographies relying too often on second hand reports and insufficient analyses of each author's works within their specific historical sequence greatly limit any meaningful answer we might give to all these important questions. Nevertheless, the primary parallels and contrasts noted above will prove essential to understand better the historical context of each author. As we now turn to a closer examination of our three authors' purposes and scopes in presenting religions other than Islam, it will thus become possible to recreate, at least in terms of the few books under study, Abū Zahrah's, Dirāz's and Shalabī's respective hermeneutical stances on the study of religion.

# 3. ON INTENTIONALITY: PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The writings of our three authors comprise seven books: Aḥmad Shalabī's four volume series on comparative religions; Muḥammad Abū Zahrah's "Lectures on Comparative Religions" and "Lectures on Christianity", and finally Muḥammad ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz's "Religion: introductory investigations into the study of the History of Religions". Taken as a group, these selected writings cannot claim to represent a broad overview of contemporary Muslim perspectives on the study of religion. There exist several other books and genres which cannot be analysed in this context[1]. The present writings simply illustrate three different perspectives on the study of religion in twentieth century Egypt. There is no attempt at analyzing the sociological relevance of these works to the larger Muslim society, although the reverse, the society's influence on the creative act behind each work, in other words its historicity, is implicitly necessary to make sense of every book. Thus keeping in mind the broader social and personal histories of each author as explained in the preceding section, this section on intentionality will analyze the subjective context surrounding the writing of each book. Through a focus on our three authors' purposes and their respective scopes in the study of religion, we will be able to extract a number of subjective elements which will clarify their intentionality, so important to understand their hermeneutics.

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[1]   For a list of other books, in English and in Arabic, written on the subject of comparative religions by contemporary Muslims, I recommend the pioneering articles of Jacques Waardenburg "World Religions as Seen in the Light of Islam," Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, eds. A.T. Welch and P. Cachia, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979), 245-269; "Twentieth-Century Muslim Writings on Other Religions: a Proposed Typology," Proceedings of the Union Europénne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Ed. R. Hillenbrand, (Edinburgh: 1982), 107-115. See also for contemporary writings on Jesus: J. Jomier, "Quatre ouvrages en arabe sur le Christ," Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales, 5(1958), 367-386.

## 3.1 MUḤAMMAD ABŪ ZAHRAH ON COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

Muḥammad Abū Zahrah wrote two books on the study of religion: "Lectures on Comparative Religions" and "Lectures on Christianity" (referred to subsequently as LCR and LC). LCR was written and first published sometime between 1933 and 1942, a period during which Abū Zahrah was a teacher of rhetoric and argumentation as well as of history of religions, denominations and sects in the Department of Preaching and Missionary Work at the College of *uṣūl al-dīn* in Cairo[2]. It is not possible to give a more definite date of publication since we must rely in the case of LCR, on a 1965 edition. In the case of LC, we know it was first published in 1942[3], although we shall be using the 1966 third edition which fortunately includes the prefaces to the first, second and third editions[4]. Moreover, it seems that the two books were written in consecutive years, probably before the beginning of the Second World War[5].

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[2]    Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Abū Zahrah: imām ʿaṣrihi* , Vol. 1, (Cairo: *dār al-ʿitiṣām*, 1985),  31.

[3]    We know that on September 15th, 1942, Dr. Raʿūf, a Muslim member of the newly formed *ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* (later renamed the Religious Fraternity or *ikhāʾ al-dīnī* ), did a presentation on Abū Zahrah's LC for a mixed Christian-Muslim audience.   See Georges Anawati, "Pour l'histoire du dialogue islamo-chrétien en Egypte: l'association des frères sincères (*ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* ) 1941-1953," Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales, 14(1980), 385-395.   This contradicts Mahmoud Ayoub's statement that both Abū Zahrah and Aḥmad Shalabī wrote after the Second World War.   See Mahmoud Ayoub, "Muslim Views of Christianity: Some Modern Examples," Islamochristiana, 10(1984), 51.

[4]    We have only the following dates for some of the prefaces: 1942, May 1949 and March 1966, when Abū Zahrah wrote the LC prefaces to the first, second and third editions respectively; March 1965 for a preface of LCR without any mention of edition.   A 1986 re-print of LCR even deleted the March 1965 reference.

[5]    There are two distinct questions to resolve: the publication year of LCR and the order of publication of LCR and LC.   On the question of the order of publication, we find on page 4 of the 1965 LCR preface that : "I divided the study into two parts, the part of the ancient religions [...] and in the second part, Christianity".   This would indicate that LCR would have preceded LC, if not in actual publication timing, at least in how it intended to be used in the classroom.   This point is reinforced in Abū Zahrah's decision to re-edit LCR in 1965 and then LC in 1966, both being re-taught by Abū Zahrah himself in the newly founded Institute of Islamic Studies in Cairo.   This is confirmed in both the 1965 LCR preface (p.4) and the 1966 LC preface (p.3).   The issue at stake is to try to find the date of the first course on comparative religions taught in Egypt.   In a table on the evolution of the al-Azhar theology programme, C. Eccel lists the subject of Muslim sects and comparative religion.   This subject was not taught in 1936, while it was taught in 1970 in both the core program for the BA and the Preaching and Missionary Work section.   See C. Eccel, Egypt, Islam and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accomodation, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz

Abū Zahrah's stated purpose in writing these books was to provide lecture notes for the students who attended his classes. He wrote: " I presented that which I found about ancient religions [while] teaching at the College of *uṣūl al-dīn*; the Institute of Islamic Studies say that I lectured in it [too] and this is a summary of the classes which I delivered to the students of this blessed institute"[6]. And in LC's first edition: " He [Abū Zahrah] was assigned the teaching of the history of religion in the Department of Preaching and Missionary Work of the College of *uṣūl al-dīn*; I delivered lectures on Christianity and this is its summary"[7]. Even as late as in 1966, the third preface to LC reveals the same basic purpose for reprinting a third edition: "When I decided to teach [comparative religions] to students of the Institute of Islamic Studies, the students did not find anything to consult about it, so there was no other choice for the Institute but to reprint a [new] edition of it so as to help the students"[8]. Although such lecture notes have undoubtedly served an educational purpose for Abū Zahrah's own students, there may have been an added economic incentive behind such publications too[9]. But whether educational or economic, these purposes do not indicate why Abū Zahrah was appointed to teach a course, most

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Verlag, 1984), 435.  So this fact would lead us to imply that LCR was published after 1936 and before 1942.

[6]    Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *muḥāḍarāt fī muqāranāt al-ʾadyān*, ([Cairo]: *maṭbaʿat yūsuf*, [1965]), 4.  Following references to "Lectures on Comparative Religions" will be noted as LCR.  All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

[7]    Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *muḥāḍarāt fī al-naṣrānīyah*, (Cairo: *dār al-fikr al-ʿarabī*, 1966, third edition), 8.  Following references to "Lectures on Christianity" will be noted as LC.

[8]    LC, 3.

[9]    In order to compensate for the often insufficient salaries which teachers have urned at al-Azhar, a recent (twentieth century) tradition has developped which consists in giving full freedom to teachers over the content of their courses, including the compulsory buying of the teachers' own publications by their students.  This information has been given to this author on May 24th 1989 by ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Jallāl, a 1984 graduate of al-Azhar.  This practice has been experienced by this author too in the Faculty of Islamic Studies of the University of Jordan during the academic year 1987-1988.  It would seem that this practice on the one hand stems from the traditional method of knowlege transmission (i.e. by rote), and on the other from the well-known fact that teachers' salaries have always been at subsistance level, especially in Egypt, thus creating an incentive for teachers to make extra money by selling their own books to their students.  On the question of low salaries, see Dodge, *Ibid.*, 133-135, 137 and 168.  See also Eccel, *Ibid.*, 167-171 and 249-267.

probably the first of its kind at al-Azhar, on ancient religions and another on Christianity,

considering the fact that he came from a teaching position in rhetoric and argumentation.

Nor is it clear when and in which context such courses were first developed at al-Azhar[10].

The only clue we have is that Abū Zahrah hints that his work in the field of comparative

religions and more specifically on Christianity, is rather uncommon: "The path was not

smooth before the researcher who wanted to write on Christianity"[11].

But the real purpose behind both Muḥammad Abū Zahrah's courses and subsequent

lecture notes is more polemical in nature than strictly educational. If education is the

transmission of knowledge[12], then the real issue resides in what knowledge needs to be

transmitted, how this knowledge is selected and why. The what and the how will be

closely analyzed in the following chapter, since they deal with sources and methods. The

reason(s) why a particular set of knowlege is selected sheds light on the purpose(s) behind

the mere transmission of knowledge. Even though in the case of Abū Zahrah the reasons

are not directly stipulated, hints can be extracted so as to illuminate his real intention, which

is to prove the superiority and unique validity of Islam over and against other religions.

This underlying aim is rather obvious in the LCR preface:

I was brought up a Muslim in a Muslim nation and ever since I grew up I have
believed in God, the one and only, unique and eternal. But I was fascinated since my
childhood to know the beliefs which prevail on the earth, East and West, to know the place
of Islamic belief among them, with my faith in the Qur'ān, the truth about which there is no
doubt [...]". And: "I thus ended with what I began, belie ng in the Qur'ān and its beliefs,

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[10]      Eccel, Ibid., 435-437.  There is an unfortunate gap in Eccel's tables between 1936
and    1970.
[11]      LC, 10.  The question remains unsolved as to whether the work is perceived as new
because of Abū Zahrah's method, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, or because the
subject matter had never been taught at al-Azhar officially before.    It would be necessary to
check some bibliographies to get precise dates of publication for LCR and LC.
[12]      Education in a broader meaning includes ethics too.    See Webster, Third New
International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, (Springfield: G.& C.
Merriam Co., 1968), 723.

in the prophet and its laws (*sharīʿah*) because there is in the Islamic belief a deanthropomorphism of the thoughts from illusions, a purification from dirt and, in the Islamic belief there is the righteousness of humanity[13].

In LC, the first preface stresses: "This book of mine is the best guide to all Christian students of the truth who are traveling on its path [..] Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for the lords beside Allah"[14]. And the last part of this verse was dropped. It reads: " And if they run away then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him)." The polemical undertones resurface in the LC second edition's preface too:

> We wrote the book "Lectures on Christianity" hoping that the truth of guidance may prevail; we do not attack any belief nor invalidate any doctrine; rather we illuminate the path and we place a light in front of the main street so that whoever wants maturity may follow it, whoever hopes for the right thing. [...] They [people] do not truly understand [religion] as a belief, nor as a spiritual correction, nor as a spiritual redemption. This is an obstacle without which guidance would reach hearts in which the spirits would radiate the light of truth[15].

This style appears once more in the third edition's preface where after much apologetic explanation of his own methods and sources, Abū Zahrah ends with the following answer to Christian criticisms:

> Lastly we tell to our brothers that we believe in the Messiah, peace be upon him, and we believe in Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him salvation, and in the remaining prophets. "Say (O Muslims): we believe in Allah and that which was revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from the Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered" (*sūrah* 2:136)[16].

In fact Abū Zahrah follows the *Qurʾānic* injunction which, within a context of discussion on beliefs regarding Jesus, calls for Muslims " to witness while dwelling among them

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13    LCR, 3-4.
14    LC, 9. The quote is from *sūrah* 3:64.
15    LC, 6.
16    LC, 5. All *Qurʾānic* quotation in English are taken from M. M. Pickthall's translation of the *Qurʾān*, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran.

[Christians]"[17]. The Western challenge which has gradually infiltrated and imposed itself on contemporary Islamic history seems to have awakened in Abū Zahrah the old stream of polemical attitude which strives to prove the superiority of Islam. Muḥammad Abū Zahrah's intentionality thus functions within the parameters of the hermeneutical Muslim tradition of $da^cwah$ developed over centuries[18].

Abū Zahrah's two books on Comparative Religions cover a scope limited by this conceptual framework. This framework was conditioned in part by his sources (see next section) and in part by the academic context, each book representing one course. Yet the two books really form only one set[19], including altogether seven sections. The first six sections total 108 pages: ancient Egyptian religion (15 pages), Hinduism (31), Buddhism (26), Confucianism (32), Greek Paganism (2) and Roman Paganism (2). The seventh section, forming LC, comprises 194 pages. It is divided itself into 16 sections which will be analyzed in the following chapter. This scope and its classification reveal a preoccupation for historical progression. On the one hand three major Eastern traditions and on the other four traditions which sprang up around the Mediterranean basin. What stands out though, is the total absence of any reference to Judaism[20], and the unspoken

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[17]     *Sūrah* 5:117. It should be added too that every preface begins with the *bismillāh* and a paragraph of Muslim prayer which refers directly (once indirectly) to the unicity of God and to the fact that Muslims believe in Jesus. Furthermore, out of the four prefaces, two end with a quotation from the *Qurʾān* and one with a prayer.

[18]     This polemical attitude represents an old stream in Islamic thought which goes back to the early formative period of Islam. The development of heresiography in the third and fourth centuries after the *hijrah* was fostered by the necessity to prove the validity of Islam over and against other existing faiths and philosophies.

[19]     LCR, 4.

[20]     In view of the absence of any reference to Judaism in any of the two books, we might ask ourselves why there was not any course on Judaism as there was on Christianity, or at least part of one. Indeed Judaism is not dealt with at all, unless Abū Zahrah discussed it in the classroom without having any written references to it. This serious absence, at least in the final documents we are left with, might indicate several possibilities. Abū Zahrah might have intended to cover it in a third book in a series on Comparative Religions. However, no clear references to this effect have yet been found. This absence might also be due to external pressures, i.e. the college administration and/or fellow teachers' not wanting that such a topic be taught. Another reason might be Abū Zahrah's own point of view, whether theological or political, on Jews and Judaism. Finally, in view of the importance of Zionist activities among the Egyptian Jewish community [W. Laqueur, A History of

assumption that the history of religions ends with Islam[21]. Except for the conspicuous

absence of Judaism from his presentation, the religions in his survey mostly reflect

traditional Muslim heresiography, with the exception of Confucianism. All these religious

traditions which were not examined by the classical Muslim heresiographers, such as

primitive religions (with the exception of pre-Islamic Arab religion), Sikhism, Taoism or

Bahā²ism, were not examined by Abū Zahrah either. In fact Abū Zahrah's scope respects

the parameters of the classical Muslim heresiographers even though he replaced the

traditional nomenclature of the field " history of sects" (*ta²rīkh al-firaq*) by the more recent

term "comparative religions" (*muqāranāt al-adyān*)[22]. Although Abū Zahrah never defined

what he meant by comparative religions, he must have been influenced somehow by

Western trends even to use this expression at all. Some references to a certain Müller on

the topic of Sanskrit literature might indicate that Abū Zahrah borrowed the term

comparative religions from some of Max Müller's writings translated into Arabic[23]. It is

thus possible to conclude that despite occasional borrowings from Western sources in

translation, Abū Zahrah's intentionality in terms of both purpose and scope reveals a

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Zionism, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), 161] and its anti-zionist counterpart in Egypt [N. J. Mandel, The Arabs and Sionism before World War I, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 191-193] as well as the Arab-Jewish frictions which were gaining political preeminence under the British Mandate of Palestine in the thirties, it is probable that any attempt at teaching a whole course, or part of it, on Judaism might have been too politically sensitive despite the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 [Laqueur, *op.cit.*, 510], first for the Egyptian nationalists and secondly for the Muslim community which might not have been ready to grant legitimacy to Judaism in the political context of the day, as it did to Christianity whose presence in Egypt was so marked. Whatever the case may be, the absence is certainly an indication that already by the late thirties, the treatment of Judaism in the higher educational Muslim context proved problematic. For personal examples of the life of Jews in Egypt in the first half of this century, see Maurice Mizrahi, L'Egypte et ses juifs: le temps révolu (xix-xx siècle), (Lausanne: [?], [?]), especially 33-34.

[21] Abū Zahrah never wrote on any religions that developed after the emergence of Islam.

[22] For a detailed listing of the different Islamic fields of inquiry over the centuries, see Ibn al-Nadīm, The Fihrist of al-Nadīm, Ed. and translated by Bayard Dodge, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

[23] LCR, 61.

hermeneutics heavily indebted to the parameters of the Islamic polemical tradition of

*da'wah*[24].

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[24]    It is not clear to what extent Abū Zahrah was influenced by the works of Sayyid Quṭb in particular.    Indeed, the works of Sayyid Quṭb mark a turning point in this Islamic tradition of *da'wah*, as he begins to transform this old theological stream into a political ideology to counteract the presence of foreign elements in the Islamic *ummah*, that is the British first and the Israelis later on through the further exposition of Quṭb's doctrines by his followers.

## 3.2 ᶜABD-ALLĀH DIRĀZ ON THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz opens the preface of his book " *al-dīn*" on the history of religions

with a clear presentation of his book's context:

> For the last three years and for the first time in the span of our Egyptian University,
> [...] the course "history of religions" entered the Fuᶜād the First University [...]. And since
> that day [1948], I was entrusted with the teaching of this course and I was commissioned to
> write and set up the course[25].

Unlike Abū Zahrah and Aḥmad Shalabī, ᶜAbd-Allāh Dī ̄z does not classify his material

according to different religions. In this respect, Dirāz follows the French school of

"*Histoire des Religions*", with its emphasis on the thematic elements common to all

religions. His book is a collection of four essays, with an important introduction, which

chiefly reconstruct the growth of accounts on religions through human history. As for his

short chronological history, is divided into several periods; Pharaonic, Greek, Roman,

Christian, Islamic and Modern (for a total of 22 pages). The first essay is entitled: "On

defining the meaning of religion" (28 pages)[26]. The second: "On the relation between

religion and various kinds of culture and education" (23). The third: "On the attitude of

religious people and the range of its firmness in creation" (24). And the fourth: "On the

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[25]     Muḥammad ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz, <u>al-dīn</u> ([Cairo]: [?] , [1952]), first and second
sentences of the preface.  Following references to this book will be noted as DIN.  It sould
be noted that the book on hand, although it includes only the 1952 dating of the preface,
also includes, at the end, the presentation which Dirāz gave at the International Islamic
Colloquium in Lahore in January 1958.  Thus our edition of the book is later than 1958.
This added section, entitled "The Place of Islam from the Other Religions' Point of View"
(pages 181 to 192) should not be considered within the pale of the book as such, although it
reveals much on Dirāz's own personal beliefs and positions.  It should be noted also that the
editors introduced this section as being a lecture delivered at the "International Colloquium
of Religions", which might have been a mistake on purpose.  The Arabic title of the
colloquium was: *al-nadwat   al-ᶜālamīyah   lil-dirasāt   al-islāmīyah.*
[26]     This first essay in Dirāz's book DIN will be analyzed in section 4.2 entitled: "On
Defining    Religion".

origin of theistic belief" (73)[27]. This final section ends with ten pages on "The Place of

Islam in Other Religions and their Relations to it"[28].

ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz's scope of analysis and his classification scheme go beyond the

traditional Islamic worldview. His primary intentionality is not to describe religions but

rather to explain religion in terms of its function and specific nature.

> I taught it might be good, before entering upon analytical studies of various religions
> [...], to have them preceded by general investigations which compare what religion is, its
> formation and its function in life and the like, within the principles of the College in which
> the university students are found[29].

In fact, this short passage contains the three key elements to make sense of Dirāz's

intentionality. The first two elements represent the premise in Dirāz's argument. The third

represents the circumscribing boundary for his analysis. In a nutshell, we may say that

Dirāz's premise on the question of the history of religions consists of two elements: a new

one and an old one. The old one is the historical analysis of various religions; the new one:

general investigations which compare what religion is, what is its formation and what is its

function in life. This division is underlined in the first page of the introduction.

> The expression 'ta'rīkh al-adyān' is an arabized expression taken from the French
> [i.e. histoire des religions]. and the coming of this name is new: Europe has known it only
> since the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, accounts of human beliefs is
> something ancient in its essence, contemporary to the differences among peoples in terms of
> their sects and divisions [...][30].

The purpose of his introduction is briefly to prove his argument so that he may then

spend the four main chapters on the newer approaches to understanding religion. Compare

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[27] The second and third essays will be analyzed in section 5.4 entitled: "On the Study of Religion".

[28] This section was added later. See section 3.2, page 42 note 1.

[29] Ibid., third sentence.

[30] DIN, 1.

the initial argument of the introduction, which implies the old descriptive survey but hints at

the newer comparative approach, with the final one:

> If we follow the chain of accounts of the religions from the period of the Pharaohs, through the Greeks, the Romans, Christianity, Islam and the Renaissance, it is possible to discern differences in their pictures from period to period, rather perhaps from time to time, within the times of one single period[31].

And the final one:

> Then do you not see that this kind [the newer branch] of study of the history of religion is for sure worthier in precedence over the well-known studies of the detailed histories of religions and that it deserves from its education point of view, to be an introduction to such studies? [...] Because of this, it is our first aim to treat this side of researches. And we thought it permissible to record here a summary whose treatment was not done yet[32].

Thus Dirāz's purpose in writing his book DIN is to present a new approach to

understanding religion, which contrasts with the older analytical historical description of the

different religions at various periods in human history. But it should be clear that his

intentionality remains within the framework of the "principles of the College", that is within

the principle of Islamic faith. Indeed, although very brief, his introduction betrays an

Islamic, and maybe even more specifically, an Egyptian outlook on how Dirāz selected the

important periods in human history. Furthermore, the centrality of religion for human

affairs, a basic Islamic *a priori*, is never challenged, despite the relative scepticism which the

psychological, sociological and philosophical approaches have sometimes created in the

European mind. We shall see in the section on describing religions how this Islamic

boundary affects the content of Dirāz's understanding and exposition of his so-called newer

approach to the study of religion.

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31   DIN, 1
32   DIN, 19.

As for his arrangement of the subject material, it is clear that ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz's scope reflects concerns and conceptions emerging out of his study period in Paris. His selecting four chapters with such topics as the definition of religion, its anthropological and sociological aspects, its moral and psychological dimensions and finally the philosophical premises for the belief in God, all speak of a desire to make available, to an Arabic speaking audience, the main issues which were debated in Europe in the thirties and forties. These were non-existent in theological and philosophical circles of Egypt in those days[33]. Furthermore, since his course was taught in the Faculty of Literature, for students of philosophy, the impact of his approach to the study of religion probably remained limited to the philosophical rather than to theological circles[34]. Whatever may be the case, it is clear that Dirāz's intentionality both in terms of its purpose and scope is heavily indebted to the Western scientific study of religion. The questions he is willing to raise and the methods he intends to use to carry out his purpose of presenting the old history of religion in a new approach so as to understand the larger phenomena of religion, all this attests to his Western influences, although the solutions he brings remain well within the boundaries of an Islamic hermeneutics.

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[33] Even the lectures delivered within the context of the *ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* in Cairo hardly dealt with the science of religion *per se*. See G. Anawati, *op.cit.*, note 4.

[34] This might explain the rather limited impact of his book. Much more difficult to find in bookstores in the nineteen eighties in comparison to Abū Zahrah's or Shalabī's books, it would seem that ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz's more open attitude to Western sciences and to their usefulness for the study of religions does not attract the same attention as Shalabī's more popular series on Comparative Religions. This point would need to be confirmed by a thorough survey though. Furthermore, the tradition to which Dirāz belongs is certainly not extinct with people such as Ḥasan Ḥanafī who write on epistemology and Islam, with the same open attitude to the West and the same commitment to Islam as Dirāz had. For example, Ḥassan Ḥanafī, Religious Dialogue and Revolution: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and Islam, (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, [1977?]).

## 3.3 AHMAD SHALABĪ ON COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

Ahmad Shalabī published his four volume series on Comparative Religions between 1960 and 1964. An ambitious project, the four books cover a wide scope reflected in their titles "Judaism" (book I), "Christianity" (book II), "Islam" (book III) and "The Great Religions of India" (book IV)[35]. The first two books to appear were "Islam" and "Christianity". They were written upon the request of some Muslims who had attended one of Shalabī's lectures on Islam, delivered on June 13th 1959 at a Christian theological college in Tjijirong, some one hundred kilometers from Jakarta[36]. "The Great Religions of India" was published third. Initially, Shalabī's intention was to write solely on monotheistic religions[37]. However, after some studies, Shalabī claimed to have understood the connection (or influences) between Islam, Christianity and the religions of India. As an example, he writes that the trinity in Christianity is a Hindu concept[38]. Another reason which brought Shalabī to study Indian culture is stipulated in book IV: " there has been a long and profound contact between Muslims and the Indian culture, yet it has remained unknown to Muslims "[39]. Furthermore, because Shalabī believes that Christianity is half way between Islam and Hinduism, he claims that it is essential to present Hinduism so as better to understand Christianity. As for Buddhism, since it has a missionary dimension, it is bound to clash with Islam. So it should also be described in order to be better

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[35]    Ahmad Shalabī mentions that he will not write on Zoroastrianism, Confucianism and primitive religions or other religions because these do not constitute a threat: they are too small and not missionary. Ahmad Shalabī, *al-yahūdīyah*, (Cairo: *maktabat al-nahḍat al-miṣrīyah*, [1960, alleged first edition], 1984 seventh edition), 20. Subsequent references will be noted as " I ".

[36]    Ahmad Shalabī, *al-masīhīyah*, (Cairo: *maktabat al-nahḍat al-miṣrīyah* , [1961, first edition], 1984, eighth edition), 22-23. Subsequent references to this second volume in Shalabī's series on Comparative Religions will be noted as " II ". It appears that some parts of this book were first published in Indonesian (p.22). At that time, Shalabī gave lectures on Islam, Christianity and Buddhism.

[37]    II, 20.

[38]    IV, 19.

[39]    *Ibid.* On the one hand, Shalabī does not seem to take into account the writings of Shahrastānī and al-Birūnī. On the other hand, it is not unfair to claim that indeed these authors' books had probably little impact on the larger Muslim population of India.

disproved[40]. This briefly explains Shalabī's reasoning for going beyond a description of purely monotheistic religions in order to include the religions of India. Finally, "Judaism" was published last, despite its 1960 first edition date. Shalabī readily acknowledged that if what was to be the first book of his series on Comparative Religions was indeed published last, it was due to the huge quantity of books Jews have written on their religion and their distortions of the images of world heroes except those of Jews[41]. He concludes this section saying: "we indeed had to tell the truth from among this boisterous bibliographical wave, to extract from it the fair notion and the right idea without any influence of bias or sympathy"[42]. Whether these reasons justify the fact that "Judaism" was written last or not , they amount to a weak argument. Indeed, Shalabī boasts elsewhere of his having read through what certainly amount to large bibliographies[43]. So what would prevent him in this case from performing such a feat? It seems more likely that a practical reason for not having read the large bibliography on Judaism might simply be that while in Indonesia, certainly very few books must have been available on Judaism. Even upon his return to Egypt in 1961, access to such books must have proven difficult too. Indeed, there are hardly any Jewish authors in the bibliography of his seventh edition of "Judaism". Yet if Shalabī were to acknowledge such circumstances, his claim to present a scientific analysis of Judaism would be greatly undermined. So rather than facing the limitations of the context in which he was working, that is, dealing mostly with second hand sources, he discredited Jewish sources at large, thus giving himself the freedom to pick those few sources which were acceptable in his eyes.

The purpose of Shalabī's series on Comparative Religions amounts, in its various paraphrases, to proving the superiority of Islam as the only valid religion:

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[40]    I,  20-21.
[41]    I,  18.
[42]    *Ibid.*
[43]    I, 17-18.   Elsewhere, he writes that he received the seeds of this science at Cambridge University: II,  19.

It is indisputable that the just and unbiased researcher will soon hail Islam when he compares the Islamic thought on the subject of "Allah", God, with the Christian or Buddhist thought on the same subject. [...] My God! Realize, through this book, my sincere aspirations of introducing Islam to those who are in search of light, truth and guidance[44].

Islam is thus the ideal solution to humanity's contemporary problems[45]. Although Shalabī claims his interest for the field of Comparative Religions dates from the middle of this century[46], which would refer to the years during which he was a doctoral student in Cambridge, what seems pressing on Shalabī's agenda of concern is to counteract Christian missionary activity in its spread through Asia and Africa[47]. This pressing concern seems to have developed while he was in Indonesia, where Shalabī engaged in much polemical debate with Christians[48]. Indeed, the whole series is written in a polemical tone[49] with a pseudo-scientific paraphernalia, to which we shall come back in section four. Moreover, in all the prefaces, besides a few ambiguous references to scientific objectivity, Shalabī really writes about his own experience at dealing with non-Muslims.

In response to his own historicity, Shalabī has developed some four themes or sub-purposes to support the underlying polemical purpose for his series on Comparative Religions. Firstly, there is an attempt at providing intellectual amunition fo⁻ Muslim stuggles, such as fighting back the missionary activities of Buddhists and of Christians especially, as well as to awaken Muslims to the threats of Jews, Zionism and its allegedly dependent organizations. Secondly, there is a desire to enlighten through "scientific

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[44] The translation comes from Aḥmad Shalabī, Islam: Belief - Legislation - Morals, (Cairo: The Renaissance Bookshop, 1970), 22-23. It should be noted that this book is almost the exact translation of III, although there is no acknowledgement to that effect. Moreover, on the back covers of the whole series on comparative religions, this book passes as if it is another book written by Shalabī in English, adding to his prestige in the eyes of the potential reader. The same deception can be found on the rear page of the English version. All subsequent reference to III will be from the pagination of the English version.

[45] III, 20, 22.

[46] III, 13.

[47] II, 26-27.

[48] II, 22-24 and IV, 17-18.

[49] Ibid., 17, 19, etc.

rationality" non-Muslims so that they may see the light of Islam. Thirdly, there is a claim to rejuvenate the science of Comparative Religions which was founded by Muslims. And lastly, there is a constant reiteration of the need to promote the science of Comparative Religions throughout the Islamic world.

For Shalabī, one of the urgent needs of his days is to provide intellectual ammunition for Muslims. Indeed " The Muslims used to know nothing about Christianity, nor about Judaism, nor about the Old and New Testaments"[50]. Thus it is imperative to have knowledge, for through this knowledge one is able to control, since knowledge influences political decision-making[51]. Shalabī gives the example of Jews who regained Palestine first through words, and then through actions[52]. So " I understand that the reconquest of Palestine must pass by certain stages, the first one of which is the stage of works of speech and writing. But this stage must be more fertile than what it is now [...]"[53]. In fact, Shalabī considers that Muslims face several ennemies, the most important ones being: the missionaries (especially Christians), the Jews and Socialism[54]. He writes " I believe that this book ["Islam"] -at this point in time- is a weapon through which the Muslim knows his religion and knows its answers". In fact, all his books in Islamic history are written with a concern for the contemporary situation[55], in order to "give answers to the millions of Muslims who have embraced Islam without dwelling deeply into it or to those who quibble and who would like to know more about it"[56].

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50    II, 20.
51    II, 17-18.
52    I, 20.   They did it through prayers too.
53    I, 19.
54    II, 24.   There is one severe indirect critique of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's regime: it witnessed the cruelty of oppression against the Muslim brothers. It is not sure when exactly Shalabī wrote this passage.
55    I, 21.
56    III, 21.

The building up of Muslim intellectual ammunition is, for Aḥmad Shalabī, best served through the weapon of Comparative Religion. Yet, the production and use of a weapon makes no sense without a target. Probably because of his Indonesian experience, the first and main target has been Christian missionaries. After describing a polemical debate with them, he writes: " We accomplished a clear victory, we raised the scale of the missionaries; and it was the science of Comparative Religions which provided us the weapon. We resisted and replied, as it was presented to us, and we attacked and questioned [back]"[57]. Of the many polemical references in the forty pages of the four books' prefaces, over fifteen represent polemical passages directed against Christian missionaries. Some refer to Christian missionary activity in Indonesia, such as:

At the same time, I was interested in producing the book "Christianity" of the series Comparative Religions; I wanted to introduce in it true Christianity as well as the distortions which generations have brought in , [...] in order that this may stop the activities of missionaries in those places [Indonesia] .[58]

In the preface to the eighth edition of "Christianity", after mentioning how both of his books "Islam" and "Christianity" have helped to rescue millions of human beings from evangelization, Shalabī explains the message of present missionaries as "political Christianity", not as that which Jesus brought. And such a political message "Is not a threat against us from the religious point of view only but a political and economic menace too"[59]. This occurs in Asia and Africa, and Shalabī further lists the means by which Christianity is spread in those areas[60]. But the most horrible (min ashna ʿin) is that missionaries have opened fronts in Islamic countries too. After expanding on this situation, he concludes:

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[57]   IV, 18.
[58]   III, 21.
[59]   II, 26.
[60]   II, 27-28.

I ask that the effort be multiplied in our republic, in Sudan, in Pakistan, and other Islamic regions so that the sinful missionary voice may be stopped forever. In all my official books and reports, I have alerted to the danger of this evangelization and I still do. These lines are one such illustration of alert so I ask that interest be directed at resisting evangelization.[...][61]

Obviously such polemical writing raised a wave of protests on the part of Christians, especially in Egypt. Shalabī skillfully includes some of those criticisms and turns them to his own advantage. He gives the example of an uneducated man who is ready to challenge him: in presenting the case only in the light of the Christian's lack of education rather than focusing on the critique itself, Shalabī manages to dismiss the person while showing his own vanity. The same occurs with the next example taken from an insulting Christian. Then he moves to a general statement by which he indicates that the majority of Christians, among whom are many people of distinction, received his book with favor. No example is given to prove this statement though, except for the fact that he was invited by the Rotary Club to deliver a lecture on the literature of fasting and its wisdom during *Ramaḍān*. At this meeting, he was asked by some leading Christians what his opinion might be on the fact that there is sometimes strife between Muslims and Christians. He gave *sūrah ʿimrān*, verse 64, as an answer. After some more discussion, Shalabī claims that his answer was well accepted and praised by leading contemporary Christians[62]. The logical argumentation of this section entitled "Position of Christians Regarding this Book" is very weak, half the section discussing Shalabī's unrelated meeting with the Rotarians. The point he is trying to make is that Christians agree with him and his book; thus what he wrote about them must be true. But more importantly for us, Shalabī's dismissal of any potentially valid criticism reflects a disability to cope with true criticisms.

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[61]    II,  28.
[62]    II,  19.

The second target for his weapon of Comparative Religion is Jews. Shalabī readily acknowledges the enmity between Muslims and Jews, and he adds: "it is a serious problem in terms of scientific research. It is clear that Jews fought with us with all weapons, the weapons of the pen, thought being among the most powerful weapons. But we tried not to descend unto that arena in the scope of [this] scientific research [...]"[63]. Indeed he writes in a footnote: "Not only people from the West were mislead by what Jews wrote, but also many Arabs and Muslims were mislead [too]"[64]. After giving examples of how Muslims have won important battles in the past against the West, especially the episode of the Crusades[65], Shalabī invokes God so that he may "Dispose of the conditions in which we can purify our sacred land from what befell in it of dirt and what descended upon it of disease"[66]. Finally, Shalabī associates with Jews, Judaism and Zionism, several organisations which form a new addition to the seventh edition: It pleases me that this edition has important additions that deal with Masonry, Rotary and Lions clubs, and the Yoga organization: those epidemics which push Zionism into our land [...]"[67]. In fact the Jews become the scapegoat for what comes from the West but is not specifically Christian. Such reasoning is justified at its source by the belief that "what Christians wrote differs from book to book while what the majority of Jews wrote is mostly a chain of accusations and hostility"[68]. Such assertions by Shalabī are never substantiated with any kind of examples however.

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[63]   I, 18.
[64]   I, 19; footnote 1.
[65]   It suggests that Shalabī links Jews and Zionism to the West on the basis of an analogy with the Crusaders.   And since Salāḥ al-Dīn did eventually conquer back Palestine in the late 13th century, Shalabī cherishes the hope of many contemporary Muslims who are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to ensure that their anachronistic parallel be fulfilled.
[66]   I, 20.
[67]   I, 23.
[68]   I, 17.

Shalabī manages logically to bead together into his preface several unconnected

themes, such as: his encounter with many different books on Comparative Religions, his

own scientific search, his reasons for writing Judaism last, the enmity with Jews, the need

for objectivity to reach the truth, the Palestinian issue and what we must learn from the

experience of how Jews regained their land, a parallel with the Crusaders and, finally, the

brief question: "Are we afraid to enter Western countries?" All this concurs to make

Shalabī's purpose in writing "Judaism" apologetic and strongly polemical, rather than

scientific as he claims it to be. As for Shalabī's personal assessment of his own

contribution, he writes: "this book is my medium in this field [Israeli-Palestinian issue] and

it represents in time my sacrifice to the spirits of the martyrs who fell or will fall in this

noble battle"[69].

If the first sub-purpose for Shalabī's series on Comparative Religions is to provide

intellectual amunition to Muslims against the attacks of the West, Christians and Jews in

particular, the second sub-purpose, intimately linked with the first one, is to enlighten non-

Muslims so that they may see the light. Here too Comparative Religions is presented as a

rational scientific tool, which speaks to the intelligence of any human being. "This science

[of comparative religions] knows its way to the reasons of people, to their libraries, to their

houses [...][70]. Elsewhere he writes:

> My book on Christianity is a present to Muslims and Christians equally because it
> represents a scientific, and not religious, investigation. I moved far away from the latter
> according to the capacity of an encompassing sympathy. Perhaps, I succeeded in this and I
> hope that, with its examples of investigations, there will be guidance and light in it [his

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[69]    I, 20.   Such an analogy makes no room for the contemporary nation-state concept out
of which Zionism emerged.   It dismisses Jewish history insofar as it is distinct from
Christian Western History, and disregards completely the recent history out of which
emerged the state of Israel (which he never mentions by name) as well as the secular
ideology prevalent in Western societies.   Whatever the limitations from our perspective, it is
clear that Shalabī functions within a worldview subservient to Qur'ānic revelation and
Islamic tradition.   Reason is at the service of a set of revealed beliefs and the subsequent
tradition which developed out of that period in history.
[70]    III, 17.

book "Christianity"] for the sons of humanity and that there be in it satisfaction for the great Creator.[71]

In his preface to the book "Islam", after claiming that Christians recognize that Muslims are more devoted and have greater devotion to their religion[72], Shalabī concludes that: "There is only Islam left which carries an incomparable number between the followers of different religions"[73]. At the end of this same preface he writes: "it is undisputed that a fair researcher will yell the shout of Islam when he compares Islamic thought on the subject of God to that of Christian or Jewish thought on the topic itself"[74]. And so on and so forth. At times, it seems that by "light" Shalabī refers to his scientific method of investigation. But even in those cases, it is obvious that his method leads to recognizing the light of Islam. Thus directly or indirectly, Shalabī's second sub-purpose remains to enlighten non-Muslims about Islam, through the use of Comparative Religions.

Shalabī's third sub-purpose is to rejuvenate the science of Comparative Religions. He is proud to claim for himself in the first page of his series the originality of the enterprise in the Muslim world. "I presented to my religion and to my country something which I am proud of, namely this study on Comparative Religions which is the first of its kind in the Arabic Library"[75]. This claim is somewhat clarified in the first two pages of his section on Comparative Religions; he explains the concept of Comparative Religions and links its initial development to early Islam[76]. With that history in mind, Shalabī's claim to

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[71]    II, 32.

[72]    It is important to compare here the English rendering of this passage. There is a clear manipulation according to the audience for whom Shalabī is writing. Indeed, instead of "Christians recognizing that Muslims are more devoted [...]", he writes in English that "specialists researching on religion admit that Muslims uphold their religion with better adherence and respect than followers of other religions do". Shalabī, III, 22.

[73]    III, 25.

[74]    III, 26.

[75]    I, 17.

[76]    I, 24-25.

be the renewer of the science of Comparative Religions in the contemporary Muslim world
is not altogether baseless[77].

Shalabī's fourth and last important sub-purpose for writing his series on
Comparative Religions, building on his attempt to renew the science of Comparative
Religions, is to provide a vehicle for the popularization of its object: namely to raise the
awareness and interest in learning about other faiths[78]. Shalabī is very astute in securing
recognition for his "new" method, which has led to a quick increase in the interest shown
for Comparative Religions. Indeed, on every first page of his later editions, Shalabī
recounts the growth of the interest in Comparative Religions, starting from al-Azhar itself.
Shalabī resorts to this indirect recognition from the leading Sunnī Muslim institution so as
to guarantee the acceptability of his series in the eyes of orthodox Muslims. Furthermore,
in many places Shalabī mentions how his books have been translated into many languages.
This is another indirect way of promoting his books. It becomes self-validating. The
editors have also added their own promotion to his series, using misleading information[79].
Finally, every book first begins with the complete list of Shalabī's publications, which
normally appears at the end of books in other Arabic publications. This bragging tone
recurs in the prefaces too, as we have just seen. It helps to create the impression that
Shalabī's books are of a high scholarly value. This spreads the ideas of his books still

[77] Such a claim Shalabī repeated to me in our interview of December 16th 1986. Yet
more important still, I have seen his books in many bookstores in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey
and Sudan. Moreover, I know that his series was translated in Indonesian, Urdu and
Persian. Shalabī also claims that they were translated into French and English too. I have
seen only one book in English and none in French. The whole series was also used
extensively, as a main textbook, in a course in Comparative Religions I attended at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in the University of Jordan, Autumn semester of 1987. Yet
Shalabī acknowledges to have utilized the books of Abū Zahrah and others. So what then
constitutes his exact originality?

[78] Obviously, Shalabī's writings reflect an apologetic response to a certain historical
reality and thus he developed an understanding of the science of Comparative Religions
which validates Islam.

[79] Some of the bibliographical information used on the covers of Shalabī's series refer
to him as a lecturer at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. There is little possibility that he
actually lectured there on a regular basis. It is more likely to have been an occasional kind
of presentation.

further, thus promoting the use of comparative religions in the light of his initial polemical purpose: to show that Islam is the only valid religion.

Shalabī's scope is determined by his preoccupation with the above mentioned purposes. These purposes explain why Shalabī wrote a series on Comparative Religions rather than separate monographs, thus shedding light on his basic intentionality which is rooted in a pattern of polemics inherited from a long historical interaction between Muslims and members of other religious communities. In this respect, he follows the example of Abū Zahrah, his earlier predecessor in pioneering the study of religion in Egypt. But the major difference is that Dirāz, who writes a generation after Abū Zahrah, is heir to a much more ideological form of polemical debate. Dirāz's intentionality thus places him in a category of his own, with a hermeneutical outlook in which politics is much more influential than in Abū Zahrah's and Dirāz's respective hermeneutics.

Our knowing each authors' intentionality is not enough to reveal the complete picture on their hermeneutics. And as a preparation to section 5 where we will investigate how Abū Zahrah, ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz and Shalabī described each religion, we shall now turn our attention in section 4 to three factors: the methods our authors have claimed to follow in their descriptions, the definitions they have put forth to explain their procedures (if mentioned at all), and the kinds of sources to which they referred. The analysis of these three elements will further define our three authors' hermeneutics on the study of religion.

## 4. ON METHODS, DEFINITIONS AND SOURCES

In the previous chapter on intentionality, certain Islamic characteristics of our three author's hermeneutics were brought to light. These in turn suggest further questions. Is it possible to see a link between these characteristics and our authors' choices of methods for the study of religion? To what extent are their claims to be using a specific method articulated consciously? The following methodology of our three authors will contribute to further define their hermeneutical parameters. A look at their use of definitions of key concepts for the study of religion will also add information. But in order to better measure our three authors' use of and potential influence from the Western scientific study of religion, another key question remains: what kinds of sources have Abū Zahrah, Diraz and Shalabī utilized to gain the knowledge which their writings present? The following three sub-sections on methods, definitions and sources will attempt to sketch some answers to these questions.

## 4.1 ON CLAIMING METHODS

Methodology is the study of methods by which procedures of inquiry in a particular field are carried out. Philosophers throughout the centuries have devised methods by which they could verify one another's claims[1]. But it is only with the scientific revolution of the Enlightenment period that methodology has grown with time to become inseparable from any serious scientific research, whatever the field of inquiry might be. This conscious preoccupation with the how in our search for the what of knowledge is particularly preeminent among the many contemporary problems dealt with in Western scientific research. The field of *Religionswissenschaft* is no exception[2]. It is thus normal that we should analyze the methodological claims and *de facto* methods which Abū Zahrah, Dirāz and Shalabī have put forward in their writings. All three authors made claims regarding methods, although none very systematically. Let us first examine each one of them separately[3] and then in comparison with one another.

Shaikh Muhammad Abū Zahrah makes no direct reference to any kind of method in his LCR. In its one and a half page preface, we find only the following short passage: "I studied about ancient religions and divine religions [...] in order to know what issues lie therein, what agrees with the power of reason and what thoughts admit of it, what reason cannot accept or must even reject [...]". It seems that, in writing his LCR in the late 1930'ies, Abū Zahrah's reason stands in lieu of a method: that is, the simple criterion of

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[1]    Eric Sharpe, Comparative Religion: a History, (London: Duckworth, 1975), 2 and 11.

[2]    F. Whaling Ed., Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion, (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1983), especially 27, 31, 384-385 of Vol. I "The Humanities".

[3]    Some aspects of these claims were already touched upon in section 3 on intentionality.

logical reasoning is enough for reaching a conclusion. However, in LC, Abū Zahrah is more explicit. In its introduction, he describes some sort of a scientific approach:

> Therefore the path is not smooth before the researcher who wishes to write about Christianity, according to what the Christians believe, to describe to the readers according to what is on the mind of those who embrace it, to aim for himself towards an unbiased point of view, to describe the beliefs as they are for t' e followers themselves and not the way it ought to have been or the way the [researcher] would believe it, since the researcher removes himself from what he embraces and believes in.[4]

He goes even farther in defining the process of scientific research: "But scientific research demands of the researcher the right freedom to study Christianity if he wants to present it the way its people believe it to be, apart from his past attitudes regarding his study"[5]. So in Abū Zahrah's prefaces, we witness some hints of the *epoché* concept in the phenomenological approach to the study of religion.

Abū Zahrah's real purpose in speaking indirectly of a scientific methodology is not so much to describe a methodological process as to legitimize his own concern: presenting Christianity in a way which will be acceptable to Christians. Indeed he repeats three times this purpose - to describe the Christians the way they really are - in the two page introduction. As for the preceding three prefaces, there are passages which stress this point too:

> God knows that I am wearing the clothes of a fair researcher who looks with an unbiased look and who abandons behind him everything in order to reach the truth as a free inquirer.[6]

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[4]    LC, 10.
[5]    *Ibid.* The parallels with al-Bīrūnī are striking. See al-Bīrūnī, The Chronology, trans. by E. Sachau (London: William H. Allen & Co., 1879), 3. Also Alberuni's India, trans. by E. Sachau (London: Tribner & Co., 1888), 4 [from a 1962 Lahore re-print].
[6]    LC, 9.

The institute had to republish [my book LC] to present it to the students and to disseminate those truths which are devoid of attacks on the followers and of anger from non-Muslims because the research follows the pure scientific method.[...][7]

We wrote those lectures in the spirit of truthfulness which gathers the truths and presents them in such a way as to be combined to one another so that they create a scientific collection which guides and does not mislead. [...] In this we were like the fair judge [*qāḍī*] who surrenders to the information which is in his hands. For it is that information which judges the evidence which we compile, without changing or altering it. We do not distort the facts whose introduction leads to it, for we go where the proof will lead us, without distortion nor corruption.[8]

Finally, and very revealing for an understanding of Abū Zahrah's meaning of the function of science and the methodological framework he claims to use, he writes: "As for the mission of science, it is not so much to oblige us to advance as to believe in the plain truth"[9]. This implies a refutation of the Western notion of progress[10], for which Abū Zahrah substitutes the core Islamic notion of faith, *imān*, in the plain truth[11].

In the following two paragraphs of the introduction of LC, Abū Zahrah contradicts his previous 'phenomenological' claims and puts forth his real method: 'comparative polemics'.

This is Jesus as it is presented in their books and teachings. We do not wish to embark on a presentation of their differences about it, or their differences in explaining this belief, nor embark on a detailed exploration of their general concepts before we expound what befell Christianity after Jesus. But we urge to elaborate their belief about Jesus on which they have decided in order that the reader may compare what came in the Holy *Qurʾān* and what came in their gospels and teachings.

We return after this to what the scientific research imposes, that is to follow the belief in its growth and in its soundness or distortion after its master. In preparation for this, we will expound what befell Christianity after him in order that the reader may notice the scope of strength of transmission between the religion and its master with these

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7    LC, 3.
8    *Ibid.*
9    LC, 4.
10   Eric Sharpe, *op. cit.*, 47-71, which is the chapter "Darwinism makes it possible". Such early use of methods is very well presented in the case of history by Ernst Breisach, Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).
11   W. C. Smith, Faith and Belief, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

accounts, and so that he may know the philosophies which were contemporary to Christianity and the range of their contact.[12]

The second part again stresses Abū Zahrah's 'scientific' endeavour, which seems limited to the methods of Muslim historiography with its heavy emphasis on transmission (*isnād*)[13]. We shall see in the following sections how Abū Zahrah's claim to follow the scientific method, both from the point of view of his own definition of science and from the point of view of a Western definition of science, holds up in the rest of his books, insofar as the use of sources and the descriptions of religions are concerned.

ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz does not claim to follow any method directly. But there are two passages in his introduction which clarify his conception of science, in particular the science of the history of religion. We have seen in section 3.2 how for Dirāz "the science of religions has two branches: a new and original branch, as well as an old branch influenced by a renewal" [14]. In short, for Dirāz the old branch is made up of the descriptive and analytical studies done for each religion. This branch he calls "histories of religions"[15].

> And there is no doubt that the main tool in the study of this branch must be the investigation of beliefs, worship and the rest of instructions in every faith, from the reality of its sayings and of its doings. [...]

This is the goal of scientific criticism which is based upon the study of history in order truly to ascertain the documents and their ascriptions and the study of the laws of language and the conventions of the arts to determine the meaning of texts, etc[16].

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[12] LC, 29.

[13] See Franz Rosenthal, A History of Muslim Historiography, second revised edition, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968); and Claude Cahen, "L'historiographie arabe: des origines au VIIè. s. H," Arabica, 13(1986), 136-137 and the methods developed by the traditionists (*muhaddithūn*).

[14] DIN, 17.

[15] This name is indeed very challenging since it would make sense to classify the field in those terms since the term history has changed over time. It would thus be possible to link the growth in the meaning of history with the growth in the perceptions and desires to describe people of other faiths, as well as people of a researcher's own faith.

[16] DIN, 18-19.

This definition is a perfect example of the historico-linguistic approach emphasized among Islamicists[17], as certainly appropriated by Diräz during his period of study in Paris. "The other branch, newer and more original, comes from the theoretical sciences and the numerous discoveries, whose aim is to satisfy the desire of reason in its striving for the origins of things and their general foundations, when its parts and details are ramified"[18]. Furthermore, Diräz adds:

> The proof of this, in our subject, is that those who investigate faiths in their plurality, if they study them comparatively and if they begin to isolate the differences and the appearances of dissimilarity, they will definitely find in them aspects of resemblance which every religion receives, and in doing so, they will find by themselves the causes which make resistance difficult and push them to extract these general foundations which defines the nature of religion wherever it may be and gather them in one whole[19].

We have here a sketch of Diräz's assumptions as to the nature of the newer approach to the study of religion which stresses the comparative method.

As for Ahmad Shalabī, we find that his claims concerning methods are often contradictory. On the one hand, there is the constant reminder that he is using the scientific method and that his approach respects the norms of science. On the other hand, his whole series presents a polemical rhetoric often devoid of scientific accuracy. This fact cannot be easily explained on the part of someone who must have learned the rudiments of scholarly research while doing his doctoral studies at Cambridge University in England. In the same paragraph in his book "Islam", Shalabī can write:

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[17]    Charles J. Adams, "The State of the Art: the Study of Islam as Religion," (Montreal; [?], 1973), 7. See also by the same author, the following two essays: "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," American Council of Learned Societies Newsletter, 25-3/4(1974), 1-10, especially 7; "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding, ed. J.M. Kitagawa, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 177-193, especially 192 for a clear example (Goldziher) and the impact of his approach on Muslims themselves.
[18]    DIN, 18.
[19]    DIN, 18.

I certify indeed that I tried strongly and earnestly to make this research scientific, not religious: that is, I made it uninfluenced by my feelings and my embracing of this religion [Islam]. [and later on] Any knowledgable researcher must favor monotheism and scorn polytheism and idols.[20]

In "Judaism", he writes:

Aside from the problem of bibliography and thoughts, there was here the problem of enmity between us and the Jews. It is a difficult problem in terms oᶠ scientific research, and it it clear that the Jews fought us with all weapons, especially the weapon of the pen, thought being among the strongest of their weapons. But we tried not to descend into this arena in place of scientific research. I had to search for the truth without the influence of any agent, in order to present to the readers the most precise of truths from the most trustworthy sources. So scientific research is integrity, integrity towards the community, integrity towards the numerous readers. It is possible that a person may speak from one point of view or another, but when he writes he leaves aside this or that point of view and searches for the truth.[21]

In "Christianity", he writes:

And my book on Christianity is a gift to both Muslims and Christians equally. They are [the book on Islam and the one on Christianity] a scientific research, not a religious one. I kept away from the the temptations of all desires. Perhaps I succeeded in this and I hope that, with examples of researches, it might be a light to guide on the path.[22]

Shalabī's claims to be using a scientific method closely resembles Abū Zahrah's claims. Both scholars subconsciously draw a direct correlation between reason (ᶜaql) and science (ᶜilm) on the basis of their Arabic-Islamic meanings. They understand science as a method which requires the use of logical reasoning, which remains subordinate to Islamic faith though. They do not see that science in the West refers to an approach, a system of inquiry which consists of several kinds of methods[23] which answer to only one ultimate criterion: human reason. In fact, we are faced with a classical example of *récupération*[24].

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20    III, 23.
21    I, 18.
22    II, 23.
23    In some circles, science has turned into an ideology in the same way as Islam has become an ideology for certain Muslims.
24    This French word means the appropriation of one set of signals and symbols with a clear meaning in a particular context, i.e. science in the West, by people of a different context who interpret this set differently, i.e. *ᶜilm* in Islamic Egypt. This process recurs constantly, though at various level of subtleties, in an Islamic polemical discourse when Muslims claim for example to believe in Judaism and Christianity: they 'recuperate' their

Moreover, both resort to the use of polemics, although Abū Zahrah's tone is less virulent

and its style less politicized. As for Dirāz, he clearly acknowledges science's aim "to satisfy

the desire of reason ...". The difference, in comparison to the previous two authors, lies in

that Dirāz avoids contrasting reason with faith. He does not refer to Islam when he

describes the Western scientific use of reason. In other words, Dirāz's interpretation of the

scientific method does not conflict with his personal faith in Islam[25].

own interpretation of the word 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' without acknowledging the different meaning it carries for Jews and Christians. It seems that we are facing this situation in the case of 'science' and '‘ilm'.

[25]      Indeed, the conflict in the case of Abū Zahrah and Shalabī reflects more the personal threat which they consider Western science to be for 'their' Islam than a real incompatibility between the Islamic religion and the use of reason which Western science requires.

## 4.2 ON DEFINING RELIGION

Whatever the methods claimed and/or used by a researcher, the process of determining the nature of a field of inquiry, in our case the study of religion, requires a minimal attempt at defining the important words in the field. It represents the process by which boundaries are drawn in order better to agree on the actual content to be analyzed. Shaikh Abū Zahrah does not define religion anywhere, nor does Aḥmad Shalabī[26]. As for ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz, he thoroughly discusses definitions of religion in the first chapter of his book. So let us then proceed to analyze how ᶜAbd-Allāh Dirāz defined and introduced the word "religion" to his 1950ies' audience of Muslim students.

Dirāz begins his first chapter "Definition of the Meaning of Religion" with the following sentences:

> The sound logical foundation, in the rational organization of our works, requires from us, when we request the explanation of a scientific truth, to start with the knowledge of its general elements and of its comprehensive values, before we begin the research on its specifics and pecularities. So for the one who would like to know the essence of the religion of Islam, or the religion of Christianity, or of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Paganism, or other religions which came into existence, it is suitable for him to increase before anything else, his endeavour to define the comprehensive meaning altogether and the common scope which it includes as a whole. If this is clear, though the religions differ among themselves or in their sources, or in their goals, or in their rights, the name 'religion' assembles all of these. So there must be here an ideal unity which permeates them [the religions] and which designates them by this common name. What is that unity? What is religion? This is the first question which we must lay down before our eyes, as we are at the threshold of the door of inquiry into the history of religions"[27]

In this prelude to defining religion, three elements stand out. The first one concerns the vocabulary Dirāz uses. His argument is based on the premise that the readers will be convinced by the first few words: "sound logical foundation" and "rational organization of

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[26]    Shalabī indirectly defines religion when he uses a saying of Muḥammad: "Religion is good human relations". III, 254.
[27]    DIN, 23.

our works". It is well-known that these words do not contradict basic *Qur³ānic* beliefs. Yet what seems striking, especially in comparison with Abū Zahrah and Shalabī, is the absence of the word *ʿilm* (knowledge, science), which could be used so easily in this context. It might be argued that by stressing, on the one hand, the power of reason and logic and, on the other, avoiding a too frequent use of the ambiguous word *ʿilm*, Dirāz could in fact appeal to the positive Islamic values regarding reason (*ʿaql*) without falling prey to the popular dichotomies such as science/religion and reason/faith[28]. There is a second element to notice from Dirāz's introductory statement above. Although Islam comes first and is followed by the monotheistic religions in Dirāz's listing, the traditional Islamic three-step hierarchy is bypassed: Dirāz treats all religions equally since they all pertain to the one conceptZ 'religion'. This revolutionary equalization for the sake of extracting the meaning of religion might not have been so easily acceptable to the Muslim readers, if it were not for the stress on the unity of meaning. This brings us to the third element worth noticing. Indeed, Dirāz's proposal to reach a common underlying ideal unity in the meaning of the word religion might reflect the subconscious assumption that such unity must exist. Such an assumption is not foreign to historians of religion in the West either. It probably stems from the subconscious tendency among monotheists to view God as ultimate unity, and thus religion as a concept that should reflect the unity of the ultimate[29].

These three elements reflect Dirāz's framework of inquiry . Although heavily influenced by the rationalistic approach in the history of religion, especially coming out of

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[28]    For an insightful analysis of the link betwen knowledge and science and the changing usage of the words 'intellect' and intellectual' today (i.e. closely identified to the analytical functions of the mind), see S. H. Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 23-24.

[29]    The repeated attempts over the last century and a half in the West to come up with one all-encompassing definition for the word 'religion' seem to me linked to a conceptual issue whose importance lies not so much in its ultimate reality as in the ultimate reality which the monotheistic traditions have pointed to.    For a serious discussion on this very crucial problem in the philosophy of science and in the philosophy of the study of religion, see F. Whaling, *op. cit.*, Vol I, 379-390.

France, Dirāz nevertheless remains within the parameters of Islamic faith, albeit moving closer to a philosophical language not unsuited to his philosophy students. His introduction is a forerunner to the rest of his chapter.

After a brief sarcastic passage on the futility of dictionnaries to give us a real meaning for many words, including a variety of contradictory statements on religion, Dirāz presents a concise etymology of the Arabic word for religion (dīn)[30]. He explains how the word dīn carries in its roots the meanings associated with three verbs. The first is dānahu, which consists of the verb dāna and its direct object hu.. It means: to grant a loan, to subjugate, to condemn, to judge, sanction and reward. The second verb is dāna followed by the particle lahu.. It means: to obey, to submit or be submitted, to pay allegiance, to surrender. The third verb is composed of dāna and the particle bishay. It means: to believe in something, to put into practice, to be used to. From dāna bishay is directly derived the noun form dīn , with the meaning of belief, path or customary practice. The three concepts are linked to one another and may be summarized as follow. In the first usage, dīn implies compulsion to submit, a sanction of some sort; in the second, it means duty or necessity to submit; and in the third, dīn means the principle which requires submission. In other words, the first implies an external obligation to submit; the second an internal obligation to submit, while the third implies the abstract concept of submission. Dirāz further distinguishes the subtle difference between dīn and dayn. The first implies a moral debt while the second implies a financial debt. Thus in Arabic, by a slight change in voweling, it is possible to move from the material to the immaterial realm[31].

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[30]     Yvonne Y. Haddad, "The Conception of the Term 'dīn' in the Qurʾān," The Muslim World, 64:2(1974), 114-123.

[31]     Dirāz tersely reminds the reader that all these meanings are authentic to the Arabic language, without any borrowings as was suggested by some Orientalists who thought the use of the word dīn might have been fostered by the presence of shuʿūbīyah attitudes in Islamic manuscripts, which tended to deny any validity to anything genuily Arab.

Then Dirāz contrasts the three Arabic meaning of *dīn* with the two meanings

generally used in the field of the history of religions. The first refers to religion in terms of

a subjective state called religiosity. The second meaning stresses objective facts which

allow a return to external habits or sensible visions. This meaning is attached to the

principles, i.e. religious doctrine, which a nation, or a group, puts into practice.

Dirāz's real aim in writing a whole chapter on the question of the definition of

religion is the following:

If it is impossible for us now, as we are at the beginning of the research, to present
the religions themselves in order to extract from them the literary limits common among
them, so we present a number of the definitions which scientists have gone through, both
what Islamicists meant by the word *dīn* and what the Westerners meant by its parallel word,
which is religion. We shall then add to this exposition something of an analysis and
criticism, in order to know to which extent these definitions may be applied to the known
religions.[32]

After quoting numerous Westerners' definitions of religion[33], he makes it clear that

in classifying religion, the ideas of submission and beliefs are insufficient[34]. It is possible

to also classify religions into revealed, mythical and natural religions. But other links to

define and reveal the essential ingredients of religion are necessary. Dirāz proves that he is

well acquainted with much of the major figures in the history of religions of the first part of

the twentieth century.

Dirāz finally concludes with:

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[32]     DIN, 28-29.

[33]     Dirāz quotes them in Arabic, with the French original or translated version in the
footnotes.

[34]     DIN, 32.

the complete limits to the essence of religion. Religion is: the belief in the existence of a higher, transcendent being, or beings, which has feelings and freedom of choice, free disposal and planning in human affairs; a belief that tends to be sent by way of secret conversation of an elevated essence in desire, fear, submission and glorification. [Or in short] the belief in a Godly being, worthy of obedience and worship.[35]

This is the definition which Dirāz gives if we consider religion from its subjective side. If we take the objective facts, then Dirāz writes: "The sum of the theoretical laws which delimit the characteristics of that Godly power and the sum of the practical doctrines which describe the path of its worship"[36].

Dirāz could have ended his chapter with these two definitions. However, he added two pages essentially to guard the readers against two dangers  The first is the tendency to describe religion only from its negative side (*tabou*). The second, even more dangerous, is to deprive religion of its essence, which combines the two notions of spirituality and divinity. These dangers are present in the definitions of the French sociological school. But what is most important to remember, notes Dirāz, is: "that the religious concept permits the belief in the creation which is not all of one kind nor in one observatory but rather some are more elevated than the rest"[37].

With this conclusion to his first chapter, we are far from the initial ideal unity pointed out in the introduction to that same chapter. This discrepancy between Dirāz's initial claim to be able to find an ideal unity in the meaning of religion and his actual conclusion with two definitions of his own seem not to have attracted his attention. This desire to bring about definitional unity for a word while recognizing its *de facto* impossibility, especially a word such as religion[38], would again support the argument

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[35] DIN, 49.
[36] DIN, 49-50.
[37] DIN, 51.
[38] On the question of the definition of the word 'religion', John Hick writes: "There is, consequently, no universally accepted definition of religion, and quite possibly there never will be." See J. Hick, Philosophy of Religion, (Englewoods Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963), 5.

thatthe conflict between unity and factual diversity as pointed out in Dirāz's definition of

religion refers to a much larger philosophical problem as regards monotheistic

conceptualisation of the word 'religion', to which both the Islamic and the Western world

are heirs[39].

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[39] The limits of definitions in the study of religion is an intriguing dilemma. It seems that we cannot know what religion is until we have studied it. And yet we cannot study it until we know what it is. This dilemma is inseparable from the discipline of the academic study of religion and underlines a dichotomy between subject and object. Religion is both at once, and generations of scholars have attempted to reduce it to one or the other: those with theological bent to subject, those with a scientific bent to object. Furthermore, a scarcely dissociable question is that of a scholar's degree of participation within a religious tradition. How can a scholar really define religion if he has not experienced it? We are facing here a second dimension to the subject-object dichotomy so imbedded in our twentieth century Western scientific culture. It is no surprise that these two questions have been so intertwined. They indeed represent one single reality: the researcher can not avoid being himself or herself an interpretive subject in symbiotic relationship with the object under analysis. Any meaningful interpretation is ontologically rooted in the relation between a human being and his/her historicity. In fact, hermeneutical thinkers agree that history and language are always both conditions and limits of understanding. How can it be different for our quest to understand religion? Whether we are dealing with the origins of the study of religion or seeking to define religion, we are bound in both cases by our own system of signs (i.d. language) and our own historicity. Habermas calls both history and language 'transitory a priori' of thought. The acknowledgement of the transitory nature of a priori means that "hermeneutics does not seek the conditions of intellegibility as such, as if understanding were always and everywhere the same". The recognition of transitory a priori makes sense of the fact that scholars of religion have not agreed on one 'best' definition of religion, but have used several working definition according to each one's context. In the light of hermeneutics, one begins to make sense of the varying reality within the discipline of the history of religions both in terms of how religion is defined, when and where the field of religious study begins and ends, and the methodology in use. Indeed, "There is no theory-free standpoint or set of rules by which we could evaluate new theoretical proposals. Instead, we must rely on something like an emerging consensus of scientists working in the field regarding the 'validity', 'fruitfulness', and 'cogency' of new developments within the field." Insofar as this precisely describes the shaping of the field of the history of religions in its various philological, sociological, psychological, structural, phenomenological, etc. variations, we may argue that the latest developments in philosophical hermeneutics may be used to infuse a new self understanding to our own discipline. A small contribution in that direction, the attempt to make sense of contemporary Muslim perspectives on the study of religion and the extent of their use of the science of religion inevitably confronts us with the issue of language and historicity. On the other hand, to religion and dīn belong two very distinct family resemblances, to use Wittgenstein's framework. The same may be said of science and ʿilm. A simple contemporary translation is bound to create a rather narrow and weak bridge between two sets of historicities: the Muslim authors' historicity and my own. Thus language and historicity intertwined in the very heart of our central working concepts of religion and science will prove another challenge to the elaboration of a proper understanding of our topic. Afterall, Smart is probably right when he wrote: "Can we arrive at an understanding of [religion] by means of a definition? This is scarcely probable". We are thus confronted with the challenge of finding other ways of reaching a satisfactory understanding of 'religion' for our field.

## 4.3  ON USING SOURCES

In the sciences as developed in the Western world, the process by which any idea or hypothesis is put forth rests on the basis of an open investigation where each argument must be substantiated with a number of evidences whose sources must be agreed and clear to all[40]. Without a clear logical demonstration of one's arguments supported by appropriate evidences in the form of sources, the hypothesis put forward risks not to be taken seriously, and the results not be considered 'factual reality'. What constitutes factual reality remains, however, always something debatable and in constant flux. Indeed, through the process of science, each area of knowledge becomes better and better circumscribed. But the nature of reality remains bound to human perceptions, however close we may think we are to an objectivereality[41].

To what extent, then, do our three authors openly indicate their sources in describing religions? How do they cite their sources? What kinds of sources do they use? These are only some of the questions which a thorough analysis of each author's use of sources would entail. In this section, due to the broad range of material, it will not be possible to do a systematic analysis of the use of sources in our three authors' books, though a timid attempt has been made through devising tabular compilations for quantitative measurements. Nevertheless, the above questions will guide our broad investigation to extract a number of examples from which the nature of our authors' *de facto* use of methods will be analyzed. Our understanding of their respective hermeneutics will become even more precise.

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[40]  James K. Feibleman, <u>Scientific Method</u>, (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), especially chapter V, "The Testing of Hypothesis: experiment," in particlular 153-159.
[41]  F. Whaling, *op. cit.*, 380.

### 4.3.1 On Acknowledging Sources of Information

As a means to try to assess our three authors' degree of subjection to Western scientific influence in terms of source references, the extent of their methods in indicating sources has been summarized in TABLE 1: Reference Survey (see following page). The three ways which are prevalent in Western scientific methods to trace back one's sources are the bibliography, the footnotes and the references within the body of a text. In TABLE 1, the number of such references are given per author and in some cases per book, or even in two instances per section of one book (DIN). We have also included the number of Qur'ānic and Biblical references, as one means quantitatively to monitor, on the one hand, the reliance upon the Islamic source par excellence and, on the other, the use of Jewish and Christian primary sources in the descriptions of Judaism and Christianity in particular. Despite many limitations in using such a graphic survey of the various types of references used by our three authors[42], it nonetheless remains useful as an indicator of some trends, specific to each author or common to two or three of them. It should be noted however that this table relies on the authors' acknowledgement of sources, for the unnamed sources go unnoticed too easily.

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[42] There are many limitations to such a Reference Survey Table. The first one is that the Arabic references may be European translations, in which case they blur the intended distinction between the Arabic cultural context and the European cultural context out of which each book comes. The second limitation is that a certain number of references does not mean much unless this number can somehow reflect the time period from which a source comes. These last two limitations are in part resolved if the reader compares Table 2 with Table 3. However, accuracy is obviously lacking. The fourth limitation is the selection of Qur'ānic and Biblical references, while not selecting any of the references pertaining directly to Hindu, Buddhist or other holy scriptures. A fifth limitation is the lack of corresponding numbers of other types of references which cannot be so easily tabulated, such as unclaimed borrowings. Finding these influences would require a great amount of time and much greater erudition.

# TABLE 1 : Reference Survey

| | Abū Zahrah | | ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz DIN* | | Aḥmad Shalabī | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LCR | LC | a | b | I | II | III | IV |
| Number of pages | 115 | 196 | 179 | 12 | 333 | 301 | 310 | 198 |
| **Bibliographical References:** in Arabic | 0 | 0 | 18 | | 197^* | | | |
| in European languages | 0 | 0 | 40 | | 52^* | | | |
| **Footnote References:** bottom of page | 9 (170 in two tables) | 5 | 103  37 | 140 | 639 | 481  502 | 1846 | 224 |
| **References:** in the text** | 57 | 128 | 15 | | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| *Qurʾānic* references: | 4 | 22 | 32 | 36 | 91 | 54 | 309 | 2 |
| **Christian Bible References***: | 76 | 61 | 0 | | 152 | 147 | 9 | 2 |

* : The 'a' column refers to the book itself while the 'b' column refers to the added presentation done in Lahore in 1958.

** : These references appear in the text itself, without any footnote references.

*** : None of the authors claimed to be using references from the Hebrew Bible, which would imply the knowledge of Hebrew. Generally, our three authors refer to the Old Testament as the Jewish *Torah*, without mentioning the differences.

^*: These numbers are a compilation of the four bibliographies found in Shalabī's four volumes.

The use of a bibliography has become a *sine qua non* in any scientific research done in the West. It is thus interesting to note that both Dirāz and Shalabī who have studied in the West make use of one in their books, while Abū Zahrah does not. Furthermore, Dirāz's degree of scientific Westernization seems higher than Shalabī's on two accounts. First Dirāz's bibliography includes the place and date of publication, while Shalabī's does not. Secondly, Dirāz refers to a much broader range of books in European languages versus Arabic ones than Shalabī does[43]. The extent to which such factors can imply greater Westernization is not clear in and of itself. However, they certainly point to the fact that Dirāz does show greater affinity with the Western scientific methods of writing bibliographies, despite the fact that both Dirāz and Shalabī earned their doctoral degrees in Europe and were thus both aware of these methods. Thus we may conclude that, in their acknowlegement of sources of information, the order of our three authors on the scale of Western scientific method versus a traditional Islamic presentation[44] is as follows: Dirāz, Shalabī and Abū Zahrah.

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[43] Dirāz's bibliography contains 17 Arabic entries, some of which are encyclopaedias or reviews, while others are monographs mostly written in the forties. It also contains 40 European entries, all in their French titles, but obviously more dated than the Arabic ones, since only four were published in the forties. This lists includes such well-known figures for their impact on the study of religion as: Bergson, Burnouf, Durkheim, Kant, Müller, Pinard de la Boullaye, Schleiermacher, Schmidt, Spencer, Tylor and Van der Leeuw. It is interesting to notice that none of the more famous Muslim early historians of religions, or heresiographers, is mentioned, although *al-fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, Dirāz's first bibliographical reference, includes several of them.

[44] Let us be clear that by setting up this scale, we do not intend to mean that the Western scientific method is in opposition to Islam. What is in opposition in this specific case is the scientific methods developed in the West in terms of source references and the lack of any cohesive method present in much of contemporary Islamic material written from the more traditional Islamic point of view. For a clarification as to what 'traditional Islam' refers to, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Traditional Islam in the Modern World, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), especially the prologue entitled: "What is traditional Islam?," 11-25.

## 4.3.2 On Accuracy in Citing Sources

In our authors' usage of bottom of the page footnotes, the same trend persists[45]. Abū Zahrah seems to follow least the Western scientific requirements, for his use of footnotes is clearly inconsistent. In the text of LCR, there are nine bottom page footnotes, six of which give some detail, one of which gives a book and author reference, one of which gives only the book reference and the other only the author reference. In LC, there are five bottom page footnotes, two of which give book and author references with a quotation but without a page number, and one of which refers to the Encyclopaedia Britannica without any page reference. The two other footnotes add precision to a specific point. However, by far the greatest number of references (170) are found in two tabular presentations comparing elements of Hinduism and Christianity on the one hand (pages 30-42), and Buddha and Jesus on the other (pages 55-68). A reference, in most cases with a page number, is given for every single element of comparison[46]. However, Abū Zahrah does not necessarily give the author of some books he refers to[47] or *vice versa*[48]. Nor do

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[45]    It should be noted that although Shalabī used more bottom of the page footnotes (1846 footnotes for 824 pages) than Dirāz did (140 for 191 pages), Shalabī cannot be considered more influenced by Western methods than Dirāz, since Dirāz's footnotes are much more accurate. The numbers are not necessarily indicative of accuracy.

[46]    It would be interesting to find out if the table presentations are an idea proper to Abū Zahrah or borrowed from one of his reference books. In the few books I was able to find, I did not find such table presentations. However, Edward Thomas does give the parallels between Buddha and Jesus at length in: The life of Buddha as Legend and History (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD, 1927), especially 238-248. Another possible source from which such a comparison could have been borrowed is A. Lillie's The Influence of Buddhism on Primitive Christianity, (London: [?], 1893, or else re-issued in a new edition as India in Primitive Christianity, 1909. The systematic use of footnotes in the case of these two table presentations seems too incongruous with Abū Zahrah's normal sparse use of them in the rest of his books. This is why I would be inclined to think that Abū Zahrah borrowed the idea of such a table presentation from someone else. Shalabī later makes use of it too: II, 183-187.

[47]    LCR, 29: "And so the author of the book 'The Pagan Beliefs in the Religion of the Christians' strikes a balance between the sayings of Hindus on Krishna and those of the Christians on Jesus, [...]". No author is given.

[48]    A quote from Herodotus (c.484-c.425 BCE) appears in LCR, 5 and one from the Latin writer Petronius (died in 65 CE) in LCR, 114 are without any book references, although in these two particular cases it is not difficult to find which books Abū Zahrah took his references from.

any of the references include place, date and house of publication. More often than not, we are faced with general expressions empty of any significance to the consciencious reader who would like to read further on a given point raised by Abū Zahrah[49]. Then there are some passing *ahādīth* (traditional accounts) with no details given; the same is true of *Qurʾānic* quotations[50]. All these examples point to the fact that Abū Zahrah's use of footnote references lacks any systematic method. Thus his eclectic way of providing source references, in comparison to Dirāz and Shalabī, least resembles the Western scientific methods developed to systematize the use of footnote references[51].

As for Shalabī, his numerous footnotes follow a much more systematic method along Western lines. Indeed he makes a systematic use of footnotes, providing a reference to almost everything he says[52]. However, there are still many discrepancies, such as inversion of authors and titles of books, changing the abreviation of a title, and of course the lack of any publication information. But the worst comes when the reader discovers the

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[49]     For example, we can find the following expressions: "Some learned people [*ʿulamāʾ* ] said that ..." (LCR, 12); "historians agree that the Egyptians used to worship." (LCR, 13); "One of the writers said about this worship that..." (LCR, 13); "Here the writings of historians vary on..." (LCR, 22); "of what is found from the historians who declare that Buddha..." (LCR, 69); etc.   In all these cases, the historians Abū Zahrah refers to are never mentioned.

[50]     In LCR, 74 there is one such *hadīth* (one traditional account) but without any *isnād* (line of transmission) reference, or even less the degree of its reliability.   Indeed, Muslims have developed a complex science of transmission to evaluate the degree of reliability of each tradition.   For an introduction on this topic, consult Mahmūd al-Ṭahhām, *taysīr muṣṭalaḥ al-hadīth*, (Riyād: *maktabat al-maʿārif*, 1985, 7th edition).   And for a more traditional survey, see: Subḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, *ʿulūm al-hadīth wa-muṣṭalahuhu*, (Beyrout: *dār al-ʿilm lilmalāyīn*, 1986, 6th edition).

[51]     We might ask ourselves if there was ever any systematic method for dealing with how sources of information were acknowledged at some time in Islamic history.

[52]     It seems at times that his books are more a juxtaposition of other people's writings, with few commentaries linking them all up into a whole, than a systematized exposition of his own.   This phenomenon recurs with Abū Zahrah too, especially in the case of his description of Confucianism.   This procedure might simply reflect, in both cases, the relative lack of good grounding in a particular topic.

limitations and often subjective interpretations Shalabī gives of certain source material in order to fit it into his own argument. Here are a few examples[53].

In the description of Buddha's life, Shalabī makes much use of Edward Thomas' book 'The Life of Buddha as Legend and History'. Among the eight references he makes to it, we find four different ways of citing this book[54]. But more important, after verification of both a 1927 first edition and a 1969 fourth reprint of the third edition of this book, where all the pages correspond, we discovered that, except for the first reference, in six other instances the text written by Shalabī does not correspond to the content written in the pages referred to. Unless Shalabī has been using a varying second edition, there is some lack of accuracy. The same is true of the 12 references to a book edited by Louis Renou (Shalabī writes Lewis Renou...) where none of the pages he gives correspond to anything in this book's 1962 first edition[55]. Unless another edition appeared before 1964, the date when 'The Great Religions of India' was published, then we are faced with misguiding references. In a few instances where the corresponding text was found, the paraphrasing was on the whole correct. There were a few interpretations, however, which implied a deliberately selective attitude[56].

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[53] It was not possible to find many of the sources Shalabī has used in writing his four book series on Comparative Religions. Thus the verification of his sources is unsystematic. Nevertheless, I feel that the examples provided are numerous enough to make the reader aware of the bias Shalabī has excercized at times.

[54] Compare IV, 150, 156, 175 and 208.

[55] The page references to the two books of H. G. Wells do not correspond either. The full reference to these two books is: A Short History of the World, (New York; The Macmillan Company, 1922); The Outline of History, (New York; The Macmillan Company, 1923).

[56] Compare Louis Renou, Hinduism, (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 49-50 with IV, 64-65. In this passage, Renou writes about the Sikhs as having "borrowed many elements from doctrines which are fundamentally Hindu", while Shalabī writes about the Sikhs who "quickly did not base their doctrines on the caste system although they called for a caste of their own and they refused to marry except those among themselves[..]". Renou does not mention anything about marriages, nor about the caste system. There is a deliberate interpretation on the part of Shalabī of what elements were borrowed by the Sikhs from Hinduism, without any such reference in Renou's words. There is also the example where Shalabī dropped the mention of Hindus who still live in Pakistan, despite an otherwise almost fully translated passage. Compare Hinduism, 44 with IV, 2-3.

Another set of examples comes from Shalabī's book on Christianity. One such

example is a whole paragraph which Shalabī quotes from Otto Meinardus' "Christian

Egypt"[57]. It translates thus:

In the March 1968, the Church of the Virgin in Sharia Tuman Bey, Zeitun, called
out a shout that the virgin had appeared in it and that it cured the sick, and the blind returned
to sight. Thousand Christians heard this shout and went to see this momentous thing. The
Christian leadership in Egypt was not convinced that to announce such a news without
authentification. So the Patriarch Cyril VI mandated the Bishop of Benī Sūyef to see that
by himself and to announce it in a press conference. And on April the second, this Bishop
announced the appearance of the virgin in this church and that it had appeared several times
in her natural size or in her upper half. So the Bishop publicly delivered this announcement
in a press conference mentioning that he had seen the virgin himself and that thousands of
people saw her with him.[58]

The passage from which Shalabī 'quoted' Meinardus, which is not on page 265 as given by

Shalabī but on page 264, reads as follows:

In April and May 1968, ten thousands of Copts and Muslims went to the Church of
the Holy Virgin in Sharia Tuman Bey, Zeitun, a suburb of Cairo, to behold "the apparition
of the Holy Virgin", who has been seen "in and around" this church. More than a month
after the first "apparition" on April 2, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate issued an official
statement, which was made by Bishop Athanasius of the of the Diocese of Benī Suef, who
was a member of the Committee appointed by Cyril VI to investigate and determine
'whether or not the Virgain has been appearing at Zeitun Church".
Reading out the statement at a press conference to which more than one hundred and
fifty local and foreign correspondents were invited, the Bishop said that he had personally
seen the apparition. "The apparition was seen on various nights and is still being seen.
Sometimes the Virgin Mary appeared in full form, while on other occasions, only the
Virgin's bust, surrounded by a glorious halo of shining light, appeared.[...][59]

57 The whole reference, which is not given by Shalabī, is: Otto Meinardus, Christian Egypt: Faith and Life, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1970). From the publication date, this whole section must have been included in one of the later revised editions.
58 II, 109.
59 Otto Meinardus, op. cit., 264.

The differences are rather obvious. The Muslims are not mentioned; the visit and declaration of the Bishop of Benī Sūyef is not an official mandate, nor is it clear from Meinardus' passage whether the press conference where he declared his seeing the virgin can be directly related to the official statement made also by the Bishop of Benī Sūyef about the appointment of a committee to investigate the matter. There is a month in between, which is April and May, not March and April as understood by Shalabī. Even if this passage were only a paraphrase of the main ideas, it would not truly represent what Meinardus wrote. The deception is even greater if Shalabī, through the use of quotation marks, intends to give the impression that he is in fact quoting Meinardus *verbatum*.

Further on, Shalabī quotes, in English (to give more weight?), from Adolf von Harnack's famous book "What is Christianity?":

Christ Described the Lord of Heaven and Earth as His God and Father, as the Greater, <u>as the only God</u>. In all things he is Dependent on and Submissive to God; and <u>over against His God</u> even includes himself among other men.[60]

The actual text from whence he takes this quotation reads as follows:

In the second place, he [Jesus] described the Lord of heaven and earth as his God and his Father; as the Greater, and <u>as Him who is alone good</u>. He is certain that everything which he has and everything which he is to accomplish comes from this Father. He prays to Him; he subjects himself to His will; he stuggles hard to find out what it is and to fulfil it. Aims, strength, understanding, the issue, and the hard must, all come from the Father. This is what the Gospels say, and it cannot be turned and twisted. This feeling, praying, working, struggling and suffering individual is a man who <u>in the face of his God</u> also associates himself with other men.[61]

The underlined passages are my own. It would seem that Shalabī either slightly turned these above quotations so that they better serve his own argument, or else he simply did not know the language he was quoting well enough truly to understand. Nevertheless, the

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[60]    II, 154.

[61]    Adolf von Harnack, <u>What is Christianity?</u>, ([?]: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 126. The first English edition of this epoch making book appeared in 1900.

passage he quotes does stress the human nature of Christ, which has been the case among the Protestant schools. This is true especially when, at the height of Biblical criticism, historians could rationalize any supernatural phenomenon due to the influence of positivism. But the lack of corresponding Catholic and Orthodox perspectives on this same issue thus serves to misrepresent the pluralistic nature of Christian theology throughout its history.

Aḥmad Shalabī's method in citing his sources is definitely borrowed from Western science. However, his lack of thorough precision in systematizing his presentation of references and his lack of complete information about each book (especially which edition of a book he is using) make his procedure less than acceptable from the point of view of Western scientific accuracy. At times, as many of the examples above have shown, the ambiguity in his references can lead to assuming a lack of intellectual integrity on Shalabī's part[62]. However, a much more systematic analysis of his references would be necessary before any such judgement could be sustained.

ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz's method of citing his sources agrees on the whole with the Western scientific norms. All footnote references are included in the bibliography. As we have seen for the bibliography, Dirāz's greater reliance than Shalabī on Western sources is also reflected in the systematic accuracy of footnote references. Of the 103 footnotes in the main book, 71 refer to Western authors, 35 to Muslim authors, and 32 to Qurʾānic references[63]. If we consider the newer approach which Dirāz uses, on the one hand it is

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[62] The difference between a lack of intellectual integrity on the one hand, and a subconscious subjectivity in the selecting of one's information on the other, is not altogether obvious. The difference would seem to lie in the degree of consciousness which one applies to his/her choices within the context of one's acknowledged methodology. Such is the notion of the problematic overlap between hermeneutics and methodology.

[63] In contrast, the article included at the end of DIN, which Dirāz wrote for the 1958 Lahore Colloquium, some eight years after he wrote DIN, contains 38 footnotes, all of which are Qurʾānic references.

surprising that he did still use so many non-Western sources. On the other hand, this fact may point to a good number of sources available in Arabic written by Muslims on topics related to the study of religion. But at a closer look, Dirāz cites only some four books written by Muslims on topics related to the study of religion. So the other works written by Muslims cannot tells us much beyond the fact that Dirāz relies on different types of Muslim sources for his analysis of the meaning of religion. As for the systematic presentations of these footnote references, we notice certain small inconsistencies such as titles abreviated in some places and not in others. But the usage of certain expressions such as "ouvrage cité" [64] does facilitate the work of the reader.

In conclusion, as regards source references, the order Abū Zahrah, Shalabī and Dirāz on the scale 'traditional Islam versus Western scientific method' holds true, although Shalabī is definitely closer to Dirāz in his accuracy in citing sources than he is to Abū Zahrah.

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[64]    See DIN, 132, 142, 158, etc.

### 4.3.3 On Various Kinds of Sources

We have looked at how the sources were used with the help of TABLE 1. With TABLE 2 (see following page), we are now able to focus on the kinds of sources our authors have used. This is of particular importance for tracing the influences which operated on the authors through their own choice of sources. In contrast to the section on intentionality where the authors expressed their ideal goals as regards their research, we can find out, through the analysis of their actual sources and how they make use of them, how far their stipulated goals are from the reality of their writings. TABLE 2 supplies information concerning several elements of our research. The major one is the distinction between the use of Muslim sources versus non-Muslim ones. The second is the different types of non-Muslim sources. Indeed, 'non-Western' is a negative definition which means nothing in and of itself. Thus there is a need further to subdivide it into several categories, the most important of which are: Christian, Jewish and Indian, if we take into consideration the coverage of religions by our three authors. This way of doing things is obviously incomplete, since no distinctions are made among the Indian sources of Hindu, Buddhist or Jain authorship. The categorization would have been a necessary *démarche* were it not for the very small number of those combined references. The method reflects the Mediterranean / monotheist point of view of all three authors and the compilor of this table[65]. A third element for our research is a compilation of sources according to linguistic differences. This was intended at first as a means to compare and quantify the relative influences of the cultural worlds of Europe, versus Arabic, Indian, or other culturo-linguistic groupings. It is important to be able to measure how much each author has used sources in a language different from his own. But this dimension has serious limitations

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[65]    Such a state of affairs is still a major characteristic in the field of the study of religion. See the following quotation of F. Whaling, *op. cit.*, 5: "These books [Whaling's two volume series] are written by an authentically international team and our only slight regret is that it has not been possible to include a non-Western scholar in the team." It seems to me that 'slight regret' is an understatement.

## TABLE 2 :  Source Survey

| | Abū Zahrah | | ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz | Aḥmad Shalabī | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LCR | LC | DIN | I | II | III | IV |
| **Muslim Sources:** | | | | | | | |
| in Arabic | 1 | 7 | 16 | 36 | 30 | 53 | 15 |
| in Islamic Languages | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| in European Languages | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| **Non-Muslim Sources:** | | | | | | | |
| Christian in Arabic | 16 | 12 | 2 | 13 | 31 | 10 | 4 |
| in European Languages | 0 | 0 | 31 | 19 | 16 | 16 | 11 |
| Jewish in Arabic | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| in Hebrew | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| in European Languages | 0 | 0 | 6 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Indian* in Arabic | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| in Indian Languages | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| in European Languages | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Other in Arabic | 3 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| in European Languages | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| **Non-identified**:** | 16 | 18 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 |

*: 'Indian' refers to one large group, whether each author is a Hindu, a Buddhist or a Sikh.

**: Either the author's name or the title (thus the language) of the book referred to is missing.

since translations were put in the translated language column, rather than in the column of the original language. A more elaborate table could have included such distinctions[66]. Nevertheless, despite all these limitations and other smaller ones[67], it is possible to extract from TABLE 2 a number of valuable conclusions.

TABLE 2 is entirely based upon source references. Thus it is inextricably linked to an author's willingness to resort to such procedures for the sake of his readers. This is why it should be studied together with TABLE 1. Moreover, the potential use of this table is directly proportional to the degree of systematic method each author has demonstrated in citing his own sources of information. This is why the first conclusion refers to the last row: the non-identified sources. There is a direct parallel between our conclusion in section 4.3.2 and the number of unidentified sources. Abū Zahrah has the greatest number because he uses least the Western scientific method of acknowledging and citing sources of information. On the other extreme, Dirāz's high degree of technical Westernization is corroborated by the absence of any unidentified source of information. As for Shalabī, he stands between Abū Zahrah and Dirāz, yet closer to the latter, because he makes a great use of the Western scientific method of acknowledging and citing sources of information, despite few exceptions and a lack of accuracy.

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[66]   The ultimate table, above and beyond our present TABLE 2, would have brocken down the present categories per religion described and per number of references.

[67]   Here are some other limitations to our TABLE 2. Shalabī's own book were not counted, for they could have distorted the real origins of his sources. Some books whose titles appear in Arabic might not necessarily have been written in Arabic. For example, the 10 Hindu Holy Books referred to by Shalabī are probably available in the Arab world only in English translation, although for some reason Shalabī decided to include them under their Arabic titles in his bibliography. The classification into the different categories was not always obvious, especially in the case of Jewish authors. Some mistakes might have crept in for which we are sorry. Finally, the period in which each source book was written is also missing. But as a whole, some three quarters of the sources used by our three authors date from the last one hundred years.

The other conclusions are meaningful to the extent that the authors have high degrees of accuracy. Thus the following conclusions will apply less precisely to Abū Zahrah. The second conclusion confirms the greater use of Western (both Christian and Jewish) sources over and against Muslim sources. This was to be expected as the development in the West of the study of religion has produced a vast literature on religions. There are two exceptions, though, to this conclusion. The first which was to be expected, concerns the overwhelming use of Muslim sources in Shalabī's book "Islam". The second, less obvious, concerns the relative balance in the number of both Muslim and Christian sources used by Shalabī in his book on "the Great Religions of India". This fact could indicate that each global tradition is, for Shalabī, equally reliable when it comes to using its information on a third religio-cultural group. To this point, the presence of some eight Hindu books with Arabic titles seems to indicate that these books are available in Arabic. If this is so, then the prospect of greater accessiblity of Hindu thought to both Christian and Muslim Arabs is a reason for rejoicing. This might spur more interest in the Arabic speaking world for the study of religions as a world phenomena.

The third conclusion regards the comparative usage of Western versus Muslim sources between Shalabī and Dirāz more specifically. Dirāz tends to show greater Westernization in his three times greater reliance on Western sources than Muslim ones, or of any other. Acknowledging the fact that the purpose for his book requires more direct borrowings from the newer developments in the study of religion in the West, Dirāz betrays his great indebtedness to Europe. He also uses books in their language of origin almost exclusively. In comparison, Shalabī makes a much greater use of Muslim sources than Dirāz. His Islamic point of view would seem to vindicate such behavior. He also relies on many Christian Arab writers. Thus Shalabī can be seen on this level too to be closer to the Islamic civilization's pool of information than was Dirāz.

The fourth conclusion states the lack of any great linguistic ability. The stage seems to be taken by Arabic, English and French respectively, to the exclusion of other very important languages without which access to primary source is very difficult. Furthermore, the correlation Dirāz - three languages, Shalabī - two languages and Abū Zahrah - one language, seems to be one more evidence to the effect that Dirāz is more liable to Western influences than Shalabī, and Shalabī more than Abū Zahrah. This very simple difference in language acquisition conveniently summarizes and further strengthen the many corroborating evidences which correspond to the above Dirāz-Shalabī-Abū Zahrah distribution on the scale of Western influences versus Islamic ones.

## 5. ON DESCRIBING RELIGIONS

With a clearer understanding of our three authors' methods, definitions and sources, we are now ready to analyse their respective ways of describing religions, the _what_ of knowledge which they intend to transmit to the readers. Instead of focusing primarily on the accuracy of the factual information throughout their descriptions of each religion, the aim is to try to find out how much our authors' hermeneutics have shaped their understanding and presentation of each religion. For this, we shall examine at times the underlying structures of their presentations on each religion as well as select examples of how each author has treated a particular aspect of a religion. Furthermore, from TABLE 3 (see following page), which surveys the topics dealt with by each author, it emerges that each author has not necessarily dealt with the same religions, nor covered them equally. The difficulties in comparing such varied coverage of different elements in the study of religion appear immediately. How can each author's factual information on each topic be verified? How can a two page coverage be compared with a 253 page one? Or how can Dirāz be compared with the other two if most of his writing does not describe specific religions directly? These questions point toward several limitations. Nevertheless, since we are preoccuppied with how three Muslims have perceived the study of religion in its broadest sense, then each author's choices for describing religions are revealing in and of themselves.

## TABLE 3 :   Topic Survey

| | Abū Zahrah | ʿAbd-Allāh Dirāz | Aḥmad Shalabī |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ancient Egyptian Religion | 15* | 2 | |
| Hinduism | 31 | | 92 |
| Jainism | | | 22 |
| Buddhism | 26 | | 67 |
| Confucianism | 32 | | |
| Greek Religion | 2 | 7 | |
| Roman Religion | 2 | 3 | |
| Judaism | | | 343 |
| Christianity | 194 | 2 | 280 |
| Islam | | 3 | 283 |
| Baha'ism | | | 10 |
| Modernity | | 5 | |
| Study of Religion | | 169 | 17 |

* : The numbers indicate the number of pages written by each author on each topic.

## 5.1 MUḤAMMAD ABŪ ZAHRAḤ

Abū Zahrah started his lectures on Comparative religions with a description of the ancient religion of Egypt which is the oldest civilization with historical evidence[1]. Yet, Abū Zahrah's main emphasis in not historical. What we find is first an appeal to the patriotic Egyptian identity, with a quote from Herodotus saying how "the Egyptians are the most religious people", to which Abū Zahrah adds: " These are true words"[2]. The tremendous legacy of the past must attest to a strong religiosity and faith. For Abū Zahrah, it is clear that the reason lies in the fact "that religion entered the race as a strong agent in all their works both private and public and religion prevailed even in writing, in special needs, in health instructions, in police orders and in government policies"[3]. Abū Zahrah is conscious that a religion which has lasted some four thousands years cannot be described in any fixed form, since

> that is against the nature of nations and against the laws of change and mutability. Therefore, we must say that the Egyptians used to alter their religion, and their beliefs changed according to the law of God among nations and in the world, as long as their religion did not rest on revealed foundations, although the revealed religions before Islam were themselves subject to distortion, alteration and change.[4]

This passage sets the framework through which Abū Zahrah interprets the religion of the Pharoahs. Indeed, he points out how the Egyptian Gods were local Gods, and thus there was no monotheism. But he adds:

> However, we must believe that calls to pure unicity in the worship of God, the one, single, everlasting, not begetting and not begotten, none comparable unto Him[5], did occur in the Egyptian mind. It would be far fetched to dismiss completely that Egyptians in the

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[1]   Geoffrey Parrinder, World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present, (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983 revised edition), 137.

[2]   LCR, 5. This quotation probably comes from Herodotus' Persian Wars, translated by George Rawlinson, (New York: Modern Library, 1942).

[3]   LCR, 5-6.

[4]   LCR, 7.

[5]   Abū Zahrah uses here the almost exact wording of sūrat al-tawḥīd (112), in the Qurʾānic chapter on Unicity.

course of five thousand years during which their civilization flourished and developed , would not have come in contact with the belief in unicity through the call of an authentic prophet[6].

So basing himself on the *Qurʾān*, especially 12:37, Abū Zahrah claims that the Egyptians were in contact with monotheism through Joseph. There was also Moses (40:15) and during the Hyksos invasion of Egypt, Abraham would have visited Egypt[7]. And through the many wars with the Asians, Abū Zahrah is certain that the Egyptians must have come into contact with the remnants of the prophets in terms of laws, beliefs and precepts. But despite all this, the beliefs in polytheism prevailed in Egypt.

In Abū Zahrah's mind, this polytheism was gradually structured by the official classes: "But it appears that the priests, who were philosophers too, were striving to unite Egyptians under one set of Gods, and therefore they were preaching a belief that would be considered the official doctrine of the country"[8]. However, due to distortions (*inḥirāf*), the religion changed from time to time and more or less according to the regions. So Abū Zahrah gives us a summary of the official religion and some of its deviations. He begins with the ancient myth of Osiris, Isis, Horus and Seth[9]. According to Abū Zahrah, Menes (King of Upper Egypt who united Upper and Lower Egypt around 3100 BCE) would have declared these Gods as incarnate in him, thus beginning the belief in the deification of the King or the incarnation of the soul of God in him. The death of the kings would have caused a conflict though. This was partly resolved through the practice of embalming the Kings especially. The worship of the King as God continued and from the trinity Osiris, Horus and Isis developed the ennead: Ra, Osiris, Isis, Shu, Tefnut, Gob and Nut, Seth and Nephthys. Scientists have argued about the reason for such developments. For Abū

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[6] LCR, 7-8.
[7] The reversal of the historical order does not seem to have preoccupied Abū Zahrah.
[8] LCR, 10.
[9] It is misleading to start a description of the ancient religion of Egypt with this myth since it belongs in fact to the Middle Kingdom period. Abū Zahrah does not demonstrate a high sense of historical accuracy in his description of the ancient religion of Egypt.

Zahrah, the important thing to remember is that the Egyptian philosophy was mixed up in the religion, which explains why at times the Egyptians used to add other Gods to lift up certain local beliefs to the larger reality to which the trinity or ennead referred. In this way the masses could be more easily brought to worship a part of the larger, all encompassing reality. After describing the official religion, Abū Zahrah describes three importa it elements, in his opinion, in the Egyptian religion: the sanctification of animals, th after-life and the soul, and the Book of the Dead.

What we may infer for our purposes from Abū Zahrah's description of the ancient religion of Egypt includes five elements, which reflect the Islamic structures of his presentation. The first one can be seen in how the common notion that Islam provides for all aspects of life is applied by Abū Zahrah to the ca ʾ of the ancient religion of Egypt[10]. The parallel is a subtle reminder of the importance of religion in all aspects of life, for a people to be strong and enjoy a long lasting civilization.

The second important element for our analysis is how Abū Zahrah uses *Qurʾānic* verses to support logical argument on matters of history. For many Muslims, there is no contradiction between history and revelation, reason and revelation. Since the *Qurʾān* is the word of God, its passages are as important a proof as archaeological evidences, and even stronger that any textual evidence which might always have been distorted[11].

The third element is the mixing of philosophy and religion. There came to exist a clear distinction in Islamic history (that is *sunnī* more specifically) between the realm of

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[10]    LCR, 5-6 as mentioned in the summary above. It would seem that Abū Zahrah might have taken this concept from G. Maspero in: History of Egypt, Chaldea, Syria, Babylonia, and Assyria, 9 vols, (London: The Grolier Society, 1903).

[11]    Y. Haddad, Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of history, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 46-53, especially 52.

reason unbound by religious revelation (i.e. philosophy) and that of reason submissive to Qur°ānic revelation (i.e. the religion of Islam). This distinction developed in the very structures of Islam in its early history. The modern period has witnessed an increase in this tension due to confrontation with Western science in particular. Indeed, the Islamic world has begun to rise to the challenge of integrating Western science into Islam, on the basis that Islam never denied the use of reason but on the contrary extolled it. The fundamental difference does not lie in the difference between the Western dichotomy of faith and reason and the Islamic unity which claims constructive tension between faith and reason. Rather, the difference lies on the one hand between reason as the sole critierion of judgement, whether in philosophy or Western sciences since the enlightenment period, and on the other the ultimate submission to Islamic precepts in the name of faith.

The fourth element is the need Abū Zahrah must have felt to present the ancient religion of Egypt first in terms of an official doctrine, and then through three distincts topics, as if these were deviations. There seems to be an implicit contradiction between, on the one hand, the initial warning against generalizing and coming to conclusions too quickly and, on the other, committing that very same mistake himself. Indeed Abū Zahrah quotes the famous French Egyptologist G. Maspero (1846-1916) as making contradictory statements. Although Abū Zahrah assumes that Maspero "must have changed his mind, or at least rectified his opinion"[12], Abū Zahrah nevertheless correctly (in my opinion) concludes that with a religion which lasted for over four thousand years, changes over time must have occurred and that any researcher must allow for these. Yet what changes does Abū Zahrah himself allow for? He does not allow for any type of historical growth in the development of the ancient religion of Egypt. He does not allow for changes from simple to more complex, to the following need for systematizing the complexities. What Abū

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[12]    LCR, 6.

Zahrah allows for in terms of changes is what looks like Islamic structures whose patterns he imposes on his description of the ancient religion of Egypt. Indeed, he believes in one eternal, true religion -Islam- to which all other religions must in some degree conform if they truly be religions. Thus Islamic normative doctrines must have some sort of counterpart in ancient Egypt. Otherwise, ancient Egyptians would not have had what would classify as a religion from Abū Zahrah's perspective. As for the many deviations from the normative doctrines in Egypt, they form the grounds from which the manifold changes in history can be explained.

In his description of Greek Religion, Abū Zahrah points toward a few pictures, not to make sense of Greek religion as a whole, but rather to prove how pagan it was from an Islamic point of view. The title of his chapter is revealing in and of itself: On Greek Paganism. Each paragraph takes up one characteristic of paganism as understood (but never clearly defined) in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition. The first paragraph talks about the deification of natural elements and phenomena. The second presents the numerous variety of Gods and their places of worship. The third describes how the Gods were given human forms each one with its specific ideal characteristics. The fourth compares the hierarchy of Greek Gods to human lineage. In the fifth, Abū Zahrah describes how each God was made into sculptures to which sacrifices were offered. Finally, Christianity replaced this religion, although the philosophy of the Greeks and their art greatly influenced Christianity.

This two page presentation clearly projects Abū Zahrah's aim: to link Greek Paganism to Christianity. Each paragraph deals with one major characteristic of paganism which the Qurʾān so emphatically rejects. The resulting chain can be summarized as follow: pantheism, polytheism, anthropomorphism, God genealogies, God sacrifices.

Obviously the first three describe paganism in terms of Islamic norms while the last three are indirect criticisms of Christian paganistic elements borrowed from the Greeks.

Abū Zahrah presents Roman Religion as he did Greek Religion: as Roman paganism. The first paragraph contrasts the unity of the creator with polytheism. "But they [the Romans] did not believe in the unity of the creator. Rather they multiplied their Gods for the multiplicity of natural phenomena"[13]. Many Roman Gods were borrowed from the Greeks and the Egyptians. The second paragraph discuses how gradually the Romans came to represent their Gods through statues like the Greeks, although they did not add to their Gods human characteristics or links of alliances. The main function of each God was "to control one power of nature and to do good or evil to people, as he so desired"[14]. The third paragraph discusses omens and predictions, although the Romans claimed that Gods often sent ominous signs without human beings asking for them, such as the case of the flying star alleged to have been seen on the day Caesar died. And the last sentence: "And thus the Romans used to sanctify their emperor and they erected niches"[15]. The first two parts reflect a description of Roman paganism stressing polytheism and anthropomorphism. The third and fourth, although correct in their factual content, can point to an indirect polemical attack on Christian beliefs, such as the star at Jesus'birth, the dove over Jesus' head at baptism, and finally turning a human into a God to be worshipped.

Building upon the above results of LCR, Abū Zahrah now devotes a whole book to Christianity. His subjectivity emerges from a simple analysis of this book's structure. There is an introductory section[16], five main sections and a conclusion. The first section

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[13]    LCR, 114.
[14]    LCR, 115.    See also Nielsen, *op. cit.*, 277-278.
[15]    LCR, 115.
[16]    For the essential elements of this introduction, see section 3.1 on intentionality, pages 35-41.

introduces Christianity according to the Islamic perspective. It is made up of two chapters.

The first is entitled: "Christianity as it was brought by Christ, peace be upon him". It

begins with an exposition on Christianity in the Qur²ān[17], and ends with what is supposed

to be a comparison between Christ as portrayed in the Qur²ān and as portrayed in

contemporary Christianity. In fact, it is simply a short exposition of what Muslims believe

has been introduced into Christianity after the death of Jesus[18]. The second chapter looks

at the developments of Christianity in terms of the martyrs' period which was then followed

by major influences of Roman and Neo-Platonic philosophies on Christianity[19]. The

second section looks at "the sources of Christianity after Jesus"[20]. The third section

presents "Christianity according to Christians and their books"[21]. The fourth section

develops at length the history of Christianity through its different councils[22]. And the fifth

looks at the Protestant era[23].


Such a structure reveals how Abū Zahrah's main preoccupation is to contrast

Christianity as it is understood in the Islamic tradition with Christianity as Christians see it.

His first paragraph sets the polemical tone of his point of view:


Before we embark upon Christianity as it is with the Christians, we shall talk about
Christianity which was brought by Jesus, peace be upon him. If we examine the
Christianity which Jesus has brought, we find that history does not help us in it, since it

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[17]     LC, 13.
[18]     LC, 25-28. Indeed, the first sentence of this chapter is a Qur²ānic quotation (sūrah
19:34), in which Jesus is said explicitly not to be the son of God. Then Abū Zahrah asks
the question: "what entered it after he [Jesus] was raised to his Lord?". LC, 25.
[19]     It is very important to notice how from this chapter onwards, Abū Zahrah refers to
Christianity as al-naṣrāniyah, while he had been using up to then the word al-masīḥiyah.
In the Qur²ān, only the first, under the form al-naṣārā is found, while the Christians refer to
themselves using the second only.     In Abū Zahrah's mind, there is a clear distinction
between the words: al-masīḥiyah refers to ideal Christianity to which the Qur²ān points,
while al-naṣrāniyah designates the Christianity which the Christians attest to and which the
Qur²ān often refers to (some 15 passages), either as al-naṣrāniyah (once) or as the followers
of Jesus, al-naṣārā (14 passages).
[20]     LC,    40-98.
[21]     LC,    99-119.
[22]     LC,    120-166.
[23]     LC,    167-188.

comes after the period. Historical accounts clash with events which occurred in Christianity. It is possible to erase and confirm what it did till everything became confused. It became difficult to distinguish between the good and the evil, the truth and the false, the right from the wrong. We, a group of Muslims, do not know a true source worthy of the reliance and the trust of Muslims except the generous *Qurʾān* and the noble prophet's traditions. These are the two sources on which Muslims rely in this. We do not write this to force them [the Muslim sources] upon Christians, nor on the condition that it be taken as an example for them, but rather we write it so as to put in good order the research and to complete the chain[24].

Abū Zahrah's whole enterprise is certainly polemical at first sight. This is Mahmoud Ayoub's point of view[25] as well as that of Father Anawati in his comments on the activities of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ in Cairo[26]. However, this polemical attitude is never defined by them. Nevertheless, let us examine further Abū Zahrah's description of Christianity and then find out to what extent it fits the characteristics of a polemical work

In the *Qurʾān*, the belief which Christ is stated to have had is perfect monotheism (*sūrah* 5: 116-117)[27]. His mission is to announce the after-life. As for his life, Abū Zahrah writes:

If the personality of Christ is at the heart of contemporary Christianity, and the basis of the belief in it, it is necessary to demonstrate it as it came in the *Qurʾān*. We shall also

[24] LC, 12. The word *al-masīḥ* is sometimes translated as Jesus, although Messiah would be more appropriate etymologically speaking Theologically speaking, we are confronted with a problem whether we translate *al-masīḥ* by Jesus or by Messiah. On the one hand, either translation implies major Christian connotations. On the other, the Arabic word *al-masīḥ* does not carry a clear meaning in Islamic theology, although some Islamic Christology seems to be developing presently See for example the two articles by Mahmoud Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology: an image of Jesus in early Shiʿi Muslim literature," The Muslim World, 66:3(1976), 163-188; and "Towards an Islamic Christology, II: the death of Jesus, reality or delusion," The Muslim World, 70 2(1980), 91-121. For a different perspective, ʿIsām al-Dīn Ḥifnī Nāṣif, *al-Masīḥ fī mafhūm muʿāṣir*, (*Bayrūt: dār al-Talīʿah*, [1979]); and Fathī Osman, "Jesus in Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 14(1977), 448-465

[25] See Mahmoud Ayoub, "Muslim views of Christianity," *op cit*, 60-61.

[26] During a conversation with this author in March 1988 in Cairo on his article "Pour l'histoire du Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien en Egypte: l'Association des frères sincères (*ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*) 1941-1953," *op. cit.*, especially 391.

[27] LC, 12. It should be noted that Abū Zahrah never gives any references to his *Qurʾānic* quotations. He was part of a tradition in which knowing the *Qurʾān* by heart meant that there was no need to give the exact *Qurʾānic* reference to a verse. It might then be possible to infer that the audience for which the book was conceived must certainly have been made up of Muslims.

demonstrate it as it came in Christianity in order that the reader may compare between the two personalities, and know which one is closer to the imagination, and reason will accept it properly. So let us start with his mother.[28]

There is no vehemence in his language, only the faith that through a proper argumentation, reason will make it obvious that the Islamic Jesus is the true one. Such is an example of polemical logic, whereby Abū Zahrah first describes the Islamic story surrounding the coming of Jesus on earth in the form of a Qur³ānic commentary on passages dealing with the pregnancy of Mary and the birth of Jesus[29]. Obviously, there are certain aspects which are stressed: the birth of Jesus without any father and his miracles. He then develops the means by which these miracles were delivered to the Jews, and how they were hostile to them. He closes his account with how Jesus' life came to an end. He supports his arguments with Qur³ānic passages and with a long passage from the Gospel of Barnabas. For him "the gospels revered by the Christians do not differ in anything more than in the story of the crucifixion."[30] As for Jesus' mission after his alleged crucifixion, some people report that he would have fled to India. Abū Zahrah quotes Ghulām Aḥmad al-Qādiyānī al-Hindi (1837-1908) who supposedly denies such traditions[31]. After the Islamic account of the life of Jesus, the first section ends with a chapter entitled: "Comparison between Jesus in the Generous Qur³ān and Jesus in contemporary Christianity". This chapter which would point to a balanced comparison does not live up to its title. It begins with a Qur³ānic quotation (19:34) and the following sentence: "And this is its religion as it is reported and invoked by them. So what was afterwards presented of it? And what was introduced after He was elevated to his Lord?" This is the beginning of the chapter which tries to give an

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[28]    LC, 14

[29]    See the interplay between the three Qur³ānic quotations and his explanation of this topic in LC, 14-15.

[30]    LC, 24. Abū Zahrah ends his passage writing: "Let us drop the question. It suffices to say that we believe as an absolute belief that the Messiah was not crucified but was substituted by them". LC, 25.

[31]    LC, 25. Abū Zahrah quotes his passage from the Egyptian review al-Manār, without any page reference. Abū Zahrah might have translated this information from Mīrza Ghulām Ahmad's book Jesus in India, (Rabwah: Ahmadīyah Muslim Foreign Missions Department, [1962]), which, on the contrary, claims that Jesus fled to India and died there in Srinagar.

account of the life and meaning of Jesus for Christians, without any comparison whatsoever. This comparison is left for the reader to do on his own. It is interesting to notice that this section is three pages long, while the previous Islamic version of Jesus' life and mission was 14 pages. This whole chapter would benefit from source references. Indeed, only one reference is given (from the Book of Wisdom), and it is erroneous[32]. Despite the lack of references, it seems that Abū Zahrah summarizes very well the gospel passages about the early part of Jesus' life. His summary is based mostly on Matthew's account. Although the short account is indeed very well written, there are two elements worth noting. The first is the assertion that Jesus would have selected twelve disciples and then seventy which he would have "sent two by two to Jewish villages and to the Galilee in order to preach the good news"[33]. Where he takes this from is unknown. The second element is stylistic. On several occasions, especially when citing a passage which goes directly against Islamic teachings, he adds words such as "according to them, in their claim, etc." [34] to make sure that there is no mistake as to where he stands on the matter. This ends our analysis of Abū Zahrah's first section on the life and teachings of Jesus, which nevertheless presents the basic Christian beliefs about Jesus.

The second section describes Christianity after Jesus. What seems important to Abū Zahrah is to show how foreign influences came to distort the early message of Christianity. He describes the different Roman emperors under whom the Christians particularly suffered[35]. The importance of this passage for Abū Zahrah is not so much to describe the historical events of early Christianity, as to see how these events influenced Christianity. In

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[32]     LC, 27. The reference is to the Book of Wisdom, chapter one verse 19 But there is no verse 19 in that chapter.

[33]     LC, 28

[34]     LC, 26-28. Such examples of Arabic expressions are· *Kamā quyila lahum*; *fi zaʿmihim*; *kamā yaʿtaqidūna*; etc.

[35]     It seems that his only source on this period would be a certain book <u>History of Civilization</u> whose author is not mentioned and, for the more specific Egyptian experience, <u>History of the Coptic Nation</u> by a Patriarch of Alexandria who remains unnamed

fact, for Abū Zahrah the disorder in the Christians' holy books, the lack of proper transmission chains, the variety in perspectives were all due to the forced underground period due to Roman persecutions[36]. This went on at the same time as there was the obvious presence of different philosophies[37], Neo-Platonism in particular, which exerted great influence on Christianity. In terms of religion - for Abū Zahrah seems to make a clear distinction between religions and philosophies - he claims that "history tells us that there were three religions in the Roman empire: Roman Paganism, Judaism and growing Christianity"[38]. The three are interrelated in the mind of Abū Zahrah. But how exactly they influenced Christianity is unsaid. As for Neo-Platonism, Abū Zahrah summarizes both the life of its founder Plotinus and its main doctrines. In both cases, there are mistakes. First Plotinus never went to India to meet with Brahmans and Buddhists[39]. He went as far as Persia and returned to Rome very quickly thereafter. He also refers to the philosophy of emanation as coming from India. Moreover, the use of the word *al-ṣūfiyah al-hindīyah* is very misleading. It could refer to the the type of sufism practiced by Muslims in India, although this is not Abū Zahrah's intended meaning. He is probably insinuating through this expression that Sufism comes from India, thus is not truly Islamic. Secondly, in his summary of Plotinus' main tenets, Abū Zahrah is confusing if not misleading. He describes the three important points in Plotinus' philosophy as: "*munshiᵓ azalī*, or the One; all the souls assemble into the One Soul, and they contact the One by way of the Intellect; the world in its order and creation is subject to these three"[40]. In fact, the three points should simply read: the One, the Intellect and the Soul[41]. Finally, Abū Zahrah uses the word Allāh to refer to the One[42]. This would suggest that Abū Zahrah subconsciously equates

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36    LC, 33.
37    Abū Zahrah lumps them together and calls them Roman Philosophy.    LC, 33-35.
38    LC,  34-35.
39    LC, 35.
40    *Ibid.*
41    Richard T. Wallis, Neoplatonism, (London:  Duckworth,  1972).
42    LC, 35.

his God, Allāh, with the highest level of Plotinus' hierarchy, which is called the One. It is unclear whether this is an intentional parallel on the part of Abū Zahrah or simply an unavoidableequation.

Abū Zahrah's presentation of the Roman persecutions, Roman philosophy and Neo-Platonism in this second section served to reach the following conclusion:

This is the contemporary philosophies at the beginning of the religion of Christianity when its transformation was taking place. And you see that Roman philosophies aim at reaching an agreement among paganism, Judaism and the Christianity of Jesus, peace be upon him, as you can see that Alexandrine philosophy attributes to the world in its creation and its organization to three elements or to the holy trinity: the One, the Intellect which is born of it as a son is born of a father, and the soul which links all living and from which life flows. And if we interpret the One as the Father, the born Intellect as the Son and the Soul as the Holy Spirit, like the Christian trinity which was adopted by some at the Nicean council and by all the councils that followed, we can conclude in terms of truth that there was some compromise. And this trinity in its meaning is the trinity of Christians. And if the being named is not changed, then why is the name changed?[43]

Abū Zahrah concludes by saying that the doctrine of the trinity was not fully completed till the end of the fourth century, well after the trinity was officially adopted at the Nicean Council in 325. But in his last paragraph, which hardly shows any connection with the preceding flow of thought, Abū Zahrah writes that there are even some European scholars who doubt the existence of Jesus, saying that his personality is legendary. Thus he ends stressing that "but we Muslims do not agree with this at all, as far as it denies the existence of Jesus which we believe in. The faithful revelation was reported through him even if we used to believe in his heart."[44]

After a pseudo-historical overview of some influential developments in the early centuries of Christianity, the third section returns to an analysis of the sources of

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[43]  LC, 36.
[44]  LC, 39.

Christianity after Jesus, especially the Gospels and the epistles[45]. One by one, Abū Zahrah reviews the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, evaluating the authenticity of authorship in the spirit of higher Biblical criticism with its emphasis on history and philology[46]. The logic of his argument is worth noticing. After eliminating the Old Testament as pertaining in fact to Judaism, Abū Zahrah briefly explains about the centrality for Christians of the four Gospels. Although the Churches agree on these four, history teaches us, says Abū Zahrah, that there were other Gospels developed from such persons as Marcion, Tertullian, Mani, the Gospel of the seventy[47], the Gospel of "al-tadhakkurah" (?) and the Gospel of "sarān tahas" (?). Although the plurality of Gospels explains in itself part of the necessity which arose in the third and fourth centuries for Christians to define a "holy" corpus, Abū Zahrah displays it at this stage with the assumption that it will discredit the truth which Christians have attributed to the four Gospels contained in the New Testament. Indeed, the next paragraph shows how "some historians mention that no explanation was found which alludes to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John before the end of the third century"[48]. In short, as the title of the next paragraph summarizes, "The Gospels were not dictated by Jesus and were not revealed to him"[49]. This remains the *leitmotiv* in this whole section, which is an effort to prove his argument in the case of each one of the four Gospels, after which Abū Zahrah repeats again:

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[45]     The Old Testament is left aside since it overlaps with research on the Jewish religion. LC, 40. It seems probable that there is in this rapid setting aside of the Old Testament a subconscious understanding that the Old Testament does not carry the same value as the New Testament, the second overriding the first. Such an understanding makes sense in the context of a progressive revelation theory upheld by Muslims. In fact, it is not considered to be that way by Christians, who have developed there own hermeneutical reading of the Old Testament, which is different from that of the Jews.

[46]     In fact, this methodology is not used as such by Abū Zahrah. He simply borrows some of its results from European scholarship which has been translated into Arabic.

[47]     LC, 41. Does he refer to the Septuagint? or what else then? There seems to be a mistake.

[48]     LC, 41. It should probably read "before the beginning of the third century". Indeed, the next sentences states that Ireneus was the first to mention the four Gospels in 209 CE.

[49]     LC, 41.

These are the Gospels which we have mentioned the way Christians wrote them. They do not believe in any other. We shall present a scientific point of view about them [the other gospels], but it is appropriate for us here to warn that these Gospels were not revealed to Jesus, peace be upon him, in their view, nor are they attributed to him. But it is attributed to some of his disciples and those related to them. They include report on Jesus and his stories, his discussions, his discourses, his beginning and end in the world as they believed them.[50]

This passage clearly distinguishes between Abū Zahrah's presentation of the four Christian gospels, as 'they', the Christians, believe in them, and the other gospels. This distinction serves the purpose of clarifying right and wrong, and the use of the word scientific here almost implies that the second part is scientific while the first is not. Finally, there is another example of Muslim reading into what is supposedly important to Christians. In Abū Zahrah's attempt to warn the readers, he mentions how the "Gospels were not revealed to Jesus, in their view, nor are they attributed to him". This implies that Abū Zahrah thinks the four gospels ought to have been revealed to Jesus or attributed to him, if they were to have any meaning. This is obviously not the case in the Christian tradition. In fact, revelation and attribution (nisbah) are concepts integral to Islamic normativity.

In the description of the Gospel of Jesus, there are some mistakes. First the passage in the Gospel of Mark is attributed to the first chapter when it comes from the second. Second, the world bishārah which we find in any Arabic version of the Bible[51] is replaced by the word injīl. This is dangerous since he is building his argument on how the word Good News, or bishārah really means injīl. With this misleading substitution, Abū Zahrah is able to write that: "because this gospel [of Jesus] was already mentioned in these Gospels [such as Matthew and Mark for example], and although it existed in the time of Jesus [...]"[52]. This implies that the Good News would be the actual Gospel of Jesus. To support his argument, Abū Zahrah refers to some 'free thinkers' whom he defines as "people who

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[50]    LC, 54.

[51]    See for example: al-kitāb al-muqaddas, ʾay kutub al-ʿahd al-qadīm wa-al-ʿahd al-jadīd, ([?]: jamʿiyāt al-kitāb al-muqaddas al-muttaḥidah, 1966).

[52]    LC, 55.

are not tied in their research to anything but science and historical truths"[53]. These people, whom he does not name except for a certain Nartan, argue, in a book from which he quotes without giving any reference, that there was in the first century a writing which was considered as a source for these gospels which Jesus had brought[54]. "and this is the [gospel] which was revealed to Jesus. Is it his gospel and the gospel of God? Perhaps."[55] According to Abū Zahrah, the Church would have coveted its remains and these would have remained in her secret custody.

There is another Gospel which scientific research has discovered according to Abū Zahrah. It is similar to the other Gospels, but it has neither been recognized nor denied by the Church. It is not a text considered by Christians as a religious source. But it has been in the hands of European scholars who have done research on it without the Church's opposition. Abū Zahrah concludes:

> This Gospel is the Gospel of Barnabas. Verily we must study it and know the opinions of Christians about it, as well as what the scientific view is without any attack upon it. However, we are convinced that it is not for us to erase the belief in their religion.[56]

The first step in establishing the validity of a Gospel is to legitimize its author. Abū Zahrah unfolds the process by first attributing to Barnabas, on the basis of an elaborate commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, an importance equivalent to that of Paul. Secondly, on the basis of the preceeding deduction, that Barnabas is one of the pillars on which the diffusion on Christianity relied, Abū Zahrah deduces that since the Gospel was attributed to Barnabas, then it must be because he was among the 12 disciples. Obviously, there is no attempt on the part of Abū Zahrah to be critical about the alleged authorship of

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[53]    LC, 56.
[54]    LC, 56.
[55]    LC, 56.
[56]    LC, 57.

Barnabas. The attribution of the name is taken for granted, and the process of deduction moves backward from that assumption.

The second step is to establish the truth about the Gospel itself. The appearance of the oldest copy of the Gospel of Barnabas, which is in Italian, is dated 1709 CE[57]. After insuring that this copy was in the hands of Christians only, he then links it to a Catholic priest, Faramino, who would have stolen it without permission from the Pope's private library in the Vatican. This then allows Abū Zahrah to jump from the early 18th century to the fifth century, when Pope Galatius the First decreed that a number of books be put on the index, one of which was the Gospel of Barnabas. There is no doubt for Abū Zahrah that this Pope's bull existed. Thus the Gospel of Barnabas would have been in hiding for thirteen hundred years.

According to Abū Zahrah, Dr. Saʿādah rejects the existence of the Gospel of Barnabas at an early date on the basis that if it existed in 492 CE and was widespread, then Muḥammad would have heard about it and referred to it. But there is no reference to it. Abū Zahrah's three counter arguments are firstly, that the prophet was illiterate, secondly, that he did not live in a country where Christianity prevailed and was far from its places of knowledge, and thirdly that he lived two centuries after the Gospel of Barnabas was outlawed, a time long enough for what was known to have been buried. Abū Zahrah's third argument is weak. The time period was not two centuries but hardly more than one. This is a short period of time considering that the decision to outlaw the book was taken in Rome at a time when there was great divisions in the Christian Roman empire The Christians of the East would have been more likely to preserve the Gospel of Barnabas, had it existed, as a

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[57] LC, 60. There are claims that this gospel was written by a Muslim. Abū Zahrah dismisses this point saying that the Muslim only translated from the original Italian version to Spanish. Abū Zahrah uses an Arabic translation done by a Christian, Dr. Saʿādah.

further defiance of Roman authority, as was the case for several other pieces of apocryphal literature[58]. So after six pages of elaboration, Abū Zahrah concludes that:

> Although they are not clear cut, these arguments are evidences that the attribution of this Gospel to Barnabas is an attribution which is probably true, because we found its original copy in the possession of Christians only, that it was known before that century that Barnabas had a Gospel and that it shows how its author had great knowledge about the *Torah*, which Christian people except for experts in theology did not know; rather those experts who knew were rare indeed, and that Barnabas was among the first propagandists whose missionary work was no less than that of Paul, as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. So he had to have either an epistle or a Gospel.[59]

Once Abū Zahrah had established in his mind the veracity of the Gospel of Barnabas, he then turned to a description of its content. The main elements here are: Jesus is not the son of God; Abraham offered Ishmael in Sacrifice, not Isaac; the last prophet is Muḥammad; and Jesus was not crucified[60]. Every one of these elements coincides with the main criticisms found in the *Qurʾān*. For Abū Zahrah, there is no doubt that this Gospel is the key to understanding true Christianity. And for that reason, he ends his chapters on the Gospel of Barnabas, saying polemically that:

> Indeed it would render a service to religions and humanity if the Church would study it, criticize it, and give us the arguments which demonstrate this criticism, comparing it to the epistles of Paul, so that the reader and the researcher may know which of these two is the most guided path, the closest to the truth. I am confident in it completely.[61]

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[58]    For more precision on the link between the apocrypha and the political context of their appearance and preservation, see Robert H. Pfeiffer, History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha, (New York: [?], 1984) and Bruce M. Metzger, An Introduction to the Apocrypha, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

[59]    LC, 62.

[60]    LC, 64-66.

[61]    LC, 67.   The most comprehensive analysis of the Gospel of Barnabas is Luigi Cirillo's *Doctorat d'Etat* from La Sorbonne. It has been published under the title: Evangile de Barnabé: recherche sur la composition et l'origine, (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1977). Its preface by Henry Corbin helps to see the significance of this gospel for our understanding of the influences of a certain current of Judeo-Christians, which later emerged as the Ebionites.   See especially pages 8-10.   For a critical assessment of Cirillo's book, see Jacques Jomier, "Une énigme persistante: l'évangile dit de Barnabé," Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales, 14(1980), 271-300.   There is also the article by Mikel de Epalza. "Etudes hispaniques actuelles sur l'évangile islamisant de Barnabé," Al-Masāq: Studia Arabo-Islamica Mediterranea. 1(1988), 33-38.

In the next section, there is a general description of a number of Christian epistles and their authors. Abū Zahrah develops several themes: inspiration, contradictions between the New Testament books; broken transmission in attributions; comparison between accounts from Muḥammad and those in Christian books; what falsehoods there are in these books and a comparison between revelation in Islam and in Christianity. Much can be written on how Abū Zahrah presented each one of these questions. Our analysis of three overlapping themes will suffice: inspiration, transmission and revelation.

Nine short chapters discuss the theme of inspiration. The first begins with: "Before we move truly to criticize scientifically [these Christian books]'s content (*matan*), and their chain of authorities, we say that the Christians declare that all these books were written under inspiration or revelation in the form of inspiration, [...][62]. After quoting unnamed Christian authorities, Abū Zahrah opens a new chapter entitled: "A Critical Point of View". "And now we wish to move from the point of view of a reporter who pretends not to notice, to a scrutinizing and exploring point of view"[63]. What does that mean? Is reporting not a part of scientific analysis? Did he not use scientific analysis before? There seems to be somecontradiction.

What this scrutinizing point of view consists of follows immediately in his section "What are the necessary characteristics in a religious book for it to be an authoritative proof?" Abū Zahrah claims it takes four element: that its prophet be considered truthful through miracles; that this book be without contradiction; that it be the result of inspiration or revelation; and that it be attibuted to the prophet through perfect transmission with only

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62    LC, 76.
63    *Ibid.*

people of integrity included in the line of transmission[64]. These criteria are immediately

applied to the Christian Gospels. The questions which Abū Zahrah asks are revealing of

his subjectivity:

> Christians do not claim that these books were written by Jesus Christ himself so
> that we will look at the strength of their attribution to him. But the claim that those who
> wrote them were apostles who came after him [...]. Are these apostles true, truthful and can
> their epistles be proven to be true without any doubt?[65]

Abū Zahrah rejects the Christian belief that the New Testament books are true on the basis

of inspiration since in the acts of Apostles and in the Gospel of Luke, the seventy or one

hundred and twenty apostles are not mentioned by name. " [...] the transmission line is not

connected between Luke and the disciples and Jesus. [...] Therefore, it is necessary to say

that the authors of these books and epistles did not invoke for themselves the writing and

the inspiration, except for Paul [...]"[66] Thus from an Islamic point of view, there cannot be

any transmission without even names. Moreover, there is not even any consensus among

Christians of the past and of today regarding who really wrote their holy books[67].

The second point worth examining is the interruption in transmission. Abū Zahrah

examines the matter in connection with inspiration, as seen above. But for some reason,

after discussing the contradictions between and within the several Christian books of the

New Testament, he comes back to this question of broken transmission, which cannot be

dissociated from the question of inspiration. He ends this chapter lamenting on the lack of

clear transmission lines and of claims of inspiration:

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[64]  It should be noted that these four criteria represent the Islamic norm.  See Muḥammad
ʿAbd  al-ʿAdhīm  al-Zarqānī,  *Manāhil  al-ʿirfān  fī  ʿulūm  al-Qurʾān*,  ([al-Qāhirah]:  ʿIsā  al-
Bābī  al-Ḥalabī,  [1952]).

[65]  LC, 78.

[66]  LC, 82.

[67]  He refers to the Encyclopedia Britannica about this, without giving any more
information  than  this.

These are their books. They believe that they were written under the inspiration of their authors, and they do not advance any proof for the claim of inspiration. The oppositions between them are expressed in their studies, and what is constant is that there is no inspiration from God. In their historical studies, they maintain that it is broken in transmission from those who attributed it to them[68].

Thus, both transmission and claims of inspiration are lacking according to Abū Zahrah.

As for revelation, the third concept, it fares no better in Abū Zahrah's sight. Islam recognizes two types of revelation: direct speech revelation and revelation of meaning to which the prophet gives his own words[69]. But in Christianity, Abū Zahrah claims: "The gospels do not therefore contain those prophecies, and thus natural human gifts entered in their books"[70]. So through emphasizing a priest who regards only the so-called prophecies in the Old Testament as truly revealed, Abū Zahrah fails to recognize the traditional Christian understanding of revelation and the multitude of interpretations presently circulating in the Christian world.

Abū Zahrah's special concern for the holy books of the Christians is equally strong in his description of Hinduism and Buddhism. The centrality of the *Qurʾān* in Islam forms the measuring rod to which all other faiths should be compared. In his conclusion about Hinduism, Abū Zahrah analyses the holy books of Hinduism[71]. He discusses how Hindus view the Veda, then describes its four parts. Finally, he runs through some concepts present in those subsequent books, the most important of which is the concept of reincarnation. And just to reaffirm his belief, Abū Zahrah ends with the Islamic *shahādah*.

For our purposes, it is important to notice how Abū Zahrah based himself almost entirely upon al-Bīrūnī for his own description of Hinduism. Indeed scattered through the

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[68]    LC, 91.
[69]    LC, 96-97.
[70]    LC, 97.
[71]    LCR, 50-52.

nineteen pages of text on Hinduism, there are 12 references to al-Bīrūnī. And in the comparative table between Hindu and Christian beliefs, there are thirteen more. In one of these references, Abū Zahrah quotes al-Bīrūnī who says that the Hindu specialists could reproduce their holy scriptures although they refrain from doing so by respect[72]. Abū Zahrah takes advantage of this passage to criticize this opinion which some Arabs and Muslims have held regarding the Qurʾān. It is clear that Abū Zahrah refers to a doctrine of the muʿtazilah, although he never states this openly. He uses the word ṣarf (to refrain from), which is linked to the word ṣirfah (the concept that human beings can reproduce the Qurʾān, although God prevents them from doing so). Abū Zahrah adds in a footnote that al-Baghdādī, al-Bāqillānī and others have refuted this position at length. Unfortunately, no page references, whether for al-Bīrūnī or for the other Muslim authors he cites are given. Abū Zahrah simply refers to the upholders of such an opinion as juhalāʾ, or ignorant people. He is not afraid of inferring from al-Bīrūnī's report that the whole muʿtazilī controversy around ṣirfah was another influence from India, thus not truly Islamic. Abū Zahrah thus uses al-Bīrūnī within his own polemical framework, disregarding al-Bīrūnī's own rejection of such an approach.

In his presentation of Buddhism, Abū Zahrah also ends with a short discussion on the holy books of Buddhism[73]. These books are not considered by Buddhists to be revealed. They contain sections on the life and deeds of the Buddha. There are several different texts due to internal divisions among Buddhists, especially between North and South. The Southern versions are closer to the truth. These books are divided into three types: collections of Buddhists laws and methods, collections of Buddha's discourses and sayings, as well as pseudo-historical accounts on the origins of a school of thought. His conclusion is that those books were translated into the language of life in such a way that

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[72] LCR, 51.
[73] LCR, 78-79.

Buddhism became a subject for ethical and philosophical studies. Such a conclusion avoids the problem of confronting Buddhism as a religion, since Buddhism does not claim any revelation.

Abu Zahrah writes 32 pages on Confucianism. A lost treasure unknown to Western scientists for centuries, the philosophies of China have been unveiled through "their striving for the demands of knowledge, even in China"[74]. His general assessment of Chinese religions is that there were transformations which allowed ethical theories to become moral practices. He concludes his introduction saying that "the most perfect religious doctrines came from the Semites, the most perfect ascetism belonged to the Hindus, speculative philosophy to the Greeks, and the most perfect practical philosophy belonged to the Chinese"[75].

In front of such ethical levels, states Abū Zahrah, the Christian missionnaries needed to look for a prophet in China and compared their holy books with those of the Chinese. But this is not necessary for Muslims since it is stated in the *Qur²ān* that God leaves no community devoid of its guidance[76]. Thus if Muslims are not aware of the name of a Chinese prophet, this does not mean that none existed. "Therefore, we cannot stop the negating position of the Christian allegations that prophets were sent to China"[77]. Unlike in ancient Greece and in the European Middle-Ages when religion and philosophy got mixed up, in China they remained together side by side. Thus Chinese ethics stands on two pillars. The first is philosophy, reason and logic. The second is religion. The two were solidified together with Confucius. It is important to notice here that Abū Zahrah feels the

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[74]     This reference to a famous *ḥadīth* also makes ambiguous as to who was really seeking knowledge about China. Abu Zahrah does not say clearly whether it were the Western scientists or Muslims who in fact lift the veil about the Chinese treasures.

[75]     LCR, 80.

[76]     *sūrah* 40: 78.

[77]     LCR, 81.

necessity to bring back the discussion on the polarity, philosophy/religion, whose

interaction varies from one religion to the other. But for Abū Zahrah,

> truly philosophical meditations and religiosity both spring from one soul, originating
> from a place in the deeper self, except that one of them stands on reason alone and the other
> stands on the report in the majority of its aspects, the benefit of the philosophical case does
> not agree with the true religion, because the true religion can not result in anything which
> could be refuted through sound intellect.[78]

Over the next five pages, Abū Zahrah repeats some of the hagiographical elements

surrounding the life of Confucius[79]. And after a large section on various Confucian

beliefs, Abū Zahrah concludes his description of Confucianism with his usual comments

regarding holy books. But in this case, there are no holy books, since it was not Confucius'

goal to write a book. Confucius' aim was the proper formation of souls. But his disciples

did record their master's opinions in the book "dialogue"[80]. It is from this book that Abū

Zahrah extracts 31 quotes in 32 pages, and only one quote from Lao Tsu's Tao Te Ching[81].

Thus, his description of Confucianism stems essentially from one book.

Abū Zahrah describes the main tenets of ancient (and at times contemporary)

Chinese beliefs[82]: "The sky, the spirits controlling the appearances of things (the angels)

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[78]  LCR, 81-82.

[79]  There is only one footnote in which Abū Zahrah discusses Taoism. LCR, 85. In it, Abū Zahrah stresses the differences between Confucius and Lao Tsu's respective philosophies. According to him, Confucius' philosophy calls for a way without exaggerations, rendering the bad for the bad for example, while Lao Tsu's philosophy calls for moderation, asceticism and complete tolerance, for example rendering good for bad. Such a presentation of the differences between Confucianism and Taoism is rather simplistic.

[80]  This book was translated from the Chinese into Arabic by professor Muḥammad Makīn.

[81]  LCR, 85. The Arabic title is *kitāb al akhlāq*, the Book of Ethics. Abū Zahrah does not give further detail.

[82]  On the origin of the word belief, see the work of W. C. Smith, The meaning and End of Religion: a new approach to the religious traditions of mankind, (New York: Macmillan, 1962) and his more recent Faith and Belief, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). Etymologically, the word belief in Arabic, ʿaqīdah, is rather linked to the concept of obligation, as things which are tied up to humans, rather than the Indo-European meaning of faith.

and the spirits of the ancestors"[83]. Although Confucius did rely on the Chinese values and traditional customs of the past, Abū Zahrah in fact misleads the reader into thinking that the traditional Chinese beliefs and practices are part of the actual Confucian philosophy and practice. Abū Zahrah should have divided his section into at least two: one describing the ancient Chinese religion and the other on Confucianism per se. Another unfortunate point is the absence of the central concept of *zhun-zi*, the ideal man, and the basic practice of *li*[84]. Abū Zahrah does stress the ethical dimensions of Confucian thought, but it is evident that he did so only on the basis of a selective reading of the Analects.

In summary, we find that Abū Zahrah makes a serious attempt to present the main religions of the world. Considering the little information in Arabic he must have had on hand in the late nineteen thirties, we may conlcude that his purposes in describing other faiths was not one of malevolent distortion. However, it is clear that his belief in the superiority of Islam affected his presentations of the various faith and often blinded him to the actual believers' point of vew[85]. And as regards to Christianity more specifically, the polemical tone is much greater than that found in his description of other religious faiths. Furthermore, we might assume that since his two books were written for Muslim students, he must have paid some attention to his readers' background. One of many such examples appears in the following passage:

> The Ancient Chinese did not believe in heaven or hell, nor reward nor punishment. Thus Confucius inherited all of these beliefs and did not add to them. He does not believe in the last day, nor does he think about about life after death, but rather all his attention was in reforming life on earth.[86]

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[83]  LCR, 88.
[84]  Nielsen, *op. cit.*, 268-273.
[85]  For a similar reality from the point of view of Christians who have analyzed Islam, see Jacques Waardenburg, L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident, (Paris, La Haye: Mouton, 1963).
[86]  LCR, 90.

There is no doubt that Abū Zahrah innovated when he first wrote his books in Egypt some fifty years ago. He innovated in terms of the idea of composing two books which conjoined analytical and descriptive approaches to so many religions. He also innovated insofar as he presented one of the first serious accounts in Arabic of Confucianism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, his primary intentionality - to prove the superiority of Islam - never fails to be present in his descriptions. His hermeneutics reflect his faith in Islam, and more particularly his belonging to an Islamic tradition of interpretation which might best be described as *sunnī* traditionalism[87]. Abū Zahrah does not betray much Western influence, except insofar as he used Max Müller's expression "Comparative Religion"[88]. Although he uses some Western books in translations, his frame of thought remains aloof to the real issues and methods present in those books, despite his *récupération* of some Protestant theological debates on the nature of Jesus and the origins of Christianity. Even though Abū Zahrah shows greater awareness of some Christian theological debates than was present in other past Muslim writings on Christianity, he nevertheless follows in the line of Islamic heresiography, with little distinctive addition to make to it in terms of methods and objectives. He remains within an Islamic hermeneutics whose main factor of contemporaneity is the polemical method he uses for his arguments: it represents the beginnings of a more ideological polemic which reflects one type of reaction within Islamic Egypt to the conflict between tradition and modernity. This trend will flourish later on with such writings as those of Shalabī, as we shall see after our analysis of Dirāz's very different approach to describing religions and the religious phenomena.

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[87]    William E. Sheppard, "Islam and ideology: towards a typology," International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 19(1987), 307-336.

[88]    In fact, Max Müller was not the first person to use this expression, although he certainly helped in popularizing it. See for further detail, Eric Sharpe, *op. cit.*, xi-xii.

## 5.2 ʿABD-ALLĀH DIRĀZ

Dirāz has not written on the various religions *per se*. This part is to come after his book DIN. He only provides his reader with a very brief overview which touches upon Egypt, Greece, Rome, Christianity, Islam and Modernity[89]. As we have seen earlier, this overview serves two purposes. The first is to expose the readers to a brief historical survey (22 pages) of some of the major developments in terms of religious history. The second purpose is briefly to mention some of the main writings which have described and analyzed religions since the dawn of history. This procedure strengthens Dirāz's argument that the descriptive approach to religions had existed for centuries before any science of religion developed in Europe. With Dirāz's two purposes in mind, we understand the major limitations which his 'descriptions' of religions entail. Nevertheless, there are important points to notice in his very cursory treatment of some religions [90].

Dirāz's presentation of the ancient religion of Egypt is very brief. He first stresses how: "no complete scroll in which the ancient Egyptians would have recorded their religion and the religions of their neighbours has reached our hands"[91]. The information we have rather comes from various papyri and stone engravings. Dirāz's stress on the absence of one single source compiling the main elements of the ancient religion of Egypt might be linked to Dirāz's Islamic frame of reference in which the *Qurʾān* provides the central written

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[89]   This overview reflects a very Mediterranean point of view, still very common in Europe at the time of Dirāz's studies in France.   It is still too common even today.

[90]   In fact, Dirāz himself would not have considered his short overviews as descriptions of 'religion' as such, since this whole section is described as if it were one long historical thread, one period after the other, without any sense that each tradition had a past and a future disctinct from that period of hegemony.   This probably explains why each section is entitled 'period' rather than religion.   But the sense that historical time moves along in one sweep limits much of Dirāz's argument in favor of newer forms of analyzing religions. However, it has the advantage of reaching his immediate goal: to provide the students with at least minimal information so that they may begin to put the rest of his book in some context larger than simply the Islamic one.

[91]   DIN, 1.

evidences for the Islamic religion. The next emphasis is on Egyptian tolerance which resulted on the one hand in freedom of worship for those who were conquered and on the other in the englobing of other Gods into Egypt's own religious system. There were exceptions, such as the school of ʿAyn Shams, which worshiped the sun God exclusively and Akhnaton's monotheism which is symbolized through the sun in heaven and the king on earth. But such revolutions did not last long. In a footnote, Dirāz mentions how recently discovered papyri show that the belief in one supreme God was known to ancient Egyptians. What remains important to Dirāz in his brief coverage of the ancient religion of Egypt is to show how tolerant Egyptians were, how they had not one single source of written holy documents, and that in that whole period there was an awareness in some circles of a monotheistic conception of God.

After the Pharaonic period, Dirāz moves to Greece and, in contrast with the paganistic interpretation of Abū Zahrah, offers a much more historical presentation. Thus he discusses Homer's Odyssey and Iliad. Then he describes the historical descriptive studies by such people as Herodotus, and the analytical studies by such people as Plato, Aristotle, and their respective schools. He then discusses Socrates, the scepticism school with Pyrrhon as well as the Epicurians and Stoics.

Three points emerge out of Dirāz's brief presentation of the Greek period. First, he begins that section with: " There is no doubt that the ancient ones among the knowledgeable people of Greece and their philosophies were trained in the school of the Eastern civilization, and the Egyptian civilization in particular."[92] Through this statement, Dirāz links his previous section on Egypt with this one on Greece. Although Dirāz makes it clear in the following paragraph that this does not belittle the great contribution the Greeks have

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[92]     DIN, 3.

made to the advancement of knowledge, he nevertheless emphasizes that the Greeks owe

much to the East. There seem to be some traces of apologetic feeling in this passage. The

second point to notice is how Dirāz sets his presentation within the context of historical

literary sources: first Homer, than Herodotus, finally Negastene (?) who wrote on India.

Through these descriptive studies, it is possible to extracts bits and pieces about various

religious practices among the Greeks and other religions with which they came in contact.

The third point worth noticing is Dirāz's order of presentation of the Greek religion. Dirāz

begins with a discussion of the historical sources and ends with a brief exposition of how

the soul came to occupy an important place in different Greek philosophies. This

development brought about a belief in Pantheism, despite the continued paganistic and

polytheistic practices. This sequence in presentati·n reflects a desire to link philosophy

with polytheism and paganism, through pantheism, whether consciously or not. Thus, in

the structure of his own presentation, we can see how Dirāz's training in the historico-

critical school of thought with its emphasis on textual analysis comes to expression.


On the Roman period, Dirāz writes:


I wonder how this mixture betwen the two nations [Greek and Roman] over
uninterrupted centuries, before and after [the takeover of Greece by Rome], di d not make
of both one single nation in language, religion, art, law, and all the values of social life, as
did the Islamic conquest in the regions where it penetrated? No, we did not even hope for
this exemplary unity![93]

In fact, Dirāz sees the Roman period as characterized by a superficial borrowing from the

Greeks.


As the Roman conquest of Greece was a reason for importing some of their ideas
widespread in the period, so was this conquest of the Asian and African countries a reason
for transfering some of their religious doctrines to Rome. So in it spread the names of
deities such as: Mithra, Baal, Isis, etc.[94]

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[93]     DIN, 9.
[94]     DIN, 10.

And from this presence of a religious pluralism, Dirāz stresses how the Roman participated in various kinds of worship on the basis that all of them were symbols of the one truth.

And this behaviour did not portray any respect of all those believers whose religion differed from their own, which is the meaning of tolerance and condoning, but rather it showed the disintegration and lack of support for whatever religion.[95]

So we find Dirāz preoccupied in this section with the notion of so-called tolerance and borrowings on the part of the Romans. There is no attempt whatsoever at describing the actual Roman civil religion.

Dirāz's description of the Christian period is extremely brief. Christianity entered the Roman empire as a challenge to the Pagan religions. There was a series of conflicts and confrontations among the different religions and philosophical schools such as Manichaeism and Neo-Platonism. But eventually Christianity took over when the Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. One of the most important proponents of Christianity in that period was Saint Augustine (354-430), who had been first a Manichaen before he converted to Christianity[96]. But the culture of argumentation went on, although this time it took place among the proponents of the different Christian doctrines. The aim became one of power struggle rather than a search for truth, according to Dirāz.

Dirāz presents the Islamic period in terms of an initial rapid conquest of much of the then known world.

A century did not pass before [Islam] moved to the regions of Western Europe (Spain, Italy, France) carrying with her the science of Islam, its literature and laws, adding to the science of the Greeks and their philosophy, and being added what the Arabs and

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[95] DIN, 11.

[96] On the neoplatonic background of Augustine, see Henry J. Blumenthal and Robert A. Markus Eds., Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of A. H. Armstrong, (London: [?], 1981).

Muslims discovered of Eastern science and literature in their travels, and what benefited them of new experiments.[97]

Dirāz writes what is well worth translating at length for it presents the author's subjectivity more precisely:

The Roman conquest passed, as we have mentioned, without making use of Greek literature except what was widespread in the market, sometimes of external views or of bad schools; and the Christian period passed busying itself with religious rhetoric, internal and external, while investigating the sciences of Greece, their history, and their different schools of thought. Thus Western Europe remained during this period as if in literary isolation from its Eastern flank which grew stronger in material links. [...] And Westerners did not open their eyes to those intellectual treasures except when it was in the hands of the Muslim Arabs who came to them from beyond the sea in the beginning of the eighth century, as conquerers in conquests of science and peace, of justice and tolerance (not conquests of greatness and arrogance, or of satisfaction of untamable instincts and extracting blood and riches).[98]

But in fact the Jews were the first to translate the knowledge of the Muslims from Arabic into Hebrew, and from there, Christians translated into Latin. As an example, Dirāz gives the sequence Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas. Although the basis of this argument carries some validity, it clearly simplifies the complexities of the relations between the Jews and the Muslims in the Middle-Ages[99]. But the main point of Dirāz's argument is that Europeans benefitted greatly from the Muslim Arabs who linked Antiquity to the Renaissance. These benefits also occurred in the field of religions: "What concerns us here are the remains of Arab Muslims in the science of religion"[100]. There are two kinds of remains: those accounts submerged in reports of human affairs or pushed away into the corners of spiritual, philosophical or rhetorical works; the other accounts are

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[97]     DIN, 12.    Dirāz surprisingly falls victim of historical anachronism.    Neither science, literature, law, nor theology for that matter, was much developed among Muslims in the first century after the conquest.

[98]     DIN, 12-13.    Here too, Dirāz suffers from historical anachronism.    He seems to project backward in time the Western Europe of the modern period, forgetting the state of Europe in the early Middle-Ages north of the Alps: the German tribes, the paucity of population, the absence of great centers of culture, etc.

[99]     For a clearer picture of the years of interaction and collaboration between Jews and Arabs in the Middle-Ages (that is in Egypt, Ifrīqīyah and Spain), see Norman Stillman, The Jews of Arab Lands: a History and Source Book, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), especially 40-63.

[100]     DIN, 14.

systematic analyses of the religions without distortions to prove a specific truth, drawing information from primary sources. Dirāz gives five examples[101] and ends with an open question: "Did Islam not make anything in the history of Comparative Religions?"[102]. What might sound like *apologetica* is in fact a claim which even a quarter of a century later still deserves much more attention.

After the Islamic period, Dirāz describes the Renaissance period. In the 13th and 14th centuries, there began in some parts of Europe a movement towards the East[103]. Many Europeans began to re-discover the treasures of the past, through the Islamic civilization. But it is really with the physical conquests of many unknown areas of the world throughout the 15-17th c period that the renaissance could be sustained and spread to the whole of Western Europe. During this time a growing number of descriptive accounts on the many religions encountered on the way were made by Europeans. By the 18th century, together with the Enlightenment period, the collective reasoning of many Europeans began to tackle anew the questions of the origin and function for religion in humanity. From the so-called natural religion of the primitive peoples, up to the moral ethical religion of Christianity, there was a need to make sense of all the differences, a need to see a progression of some sort, or rather an order of some sort.

Through the use of comparison, differences and similarities emerge among all religions. Parallels, whether true or apparent, force the researcher to ask further questions. Some have focused on the more philosophical questions; some others have addressed transient points; still others have exaggerated forms and appearances and minimize the

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[101]    These five examples are books by: Abī al-Ḥasan al-ʾAshʿarī (?-330 H.), al-Masʿūdī (?- 342 H.), Ibn Ḥazm al-Dhāhirī (? - 456 H.), al-Shahrastānī (? -548 H.), and al-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (? - 606 H.).

[102]    DIN, 15.

[103]    In fact this movement was more towards Spain, although St-Francis is an example of someone going directly to Egypt. Only later did the far Orient become a target after the return of Marco Polo.

essence and core. After a series of serious questions addressed to the student readers of his

book, Dirāz concludes with a reiteration of his basic purpose in the form of a plea:

> Then do you not see that this kind [the newer branch] of study of the history of religion is for sure worthier in precedence over the well-known studies of the detailed histories of religions and that it deserves from its educational point of view, to be an introduction to such studies? [...] Because of this, it is our first aim to treat this side of researches. And we thought it permissible to record here a summary whose treatment was not done yet.[104]

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[104]  DIN, 19.

## 5.3 AḤMAD SHALABĪ

Aḥmad Shalabī's four volume series on Comparative Religions represents by far the largest Muslim contemporary work on the study of religion. The breadth of his coverage, though not necessarily its depth, makes it difficult to analyze the vast amount of material he has gathered. We will thus need to focus on some particular aspects of his work, insofar as these selected items reflect Shalabī's hermeneutics more dramatically. We have seen in analyzing his intentionality how the polemical language, in all its different shades, remains constantly present in Shalabī's writings. He feels a sense of mission in his work which strongly influences his descriptions of the various religions he has selected. Let us analyze how he approaches every one of them so that we may then extract the structural elements of his hermeneutics, the nature and presuppostions of his interpretation of religions other than Islam.

Shalabī's series begins with a first book on Judaism. His introduction to "Judaism" was clearly written after he had completed his whole series on Comparative Religion[105]. We have seen earlier[106], how polemical his whole enterprise is and more specifically, how Shalabī himself claimed scientific neutrality, although this goal was particularly difficult in the case of Jews. If Shalabī believes he was successfully "neutral" as a whole in his series, he can be proven wrong in manifold instances, especially as regards Judaism. The enmity between Arabs and Jews which he openly acknowledges unfortunately curtails Shalabī's self-avowed goal of scientific neutrality. And it is certainly not due to ignorance on his part, for he must have learnt about the concept of *epoché* in England or if not, of its early approximation in the books of Abū Zahrah, a concept which the latter himself had

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[105]    I, 20.
[106]    In section 3.3, 47-48.

borrowed from al-Bīrūnī[107]. What remains the real goal for Shalabī is to vilify Jews and Judaism so that his argument about the enmity between the Jews and the Arabs becomes validated. The success of such an enterprise, to use Shalabī's own vocabulary, will provide the Muslims with a strong weapon in the battle to regain Palestine from the hands of the infidels[108].

Shalabī divides his book "Judaism" into six sections: Jews in history, the prophets of the sons of Israel and their beliefs according to the *Qurʾān*; the prophets of the sons of Israel and their beliefs according to non-*Qurʾānic* sources; sources of Jewish thought; legislation; and Jews in darkness. Shalabī's hermeneutics and his intentionality are transparent in the structure. The first chapter stresses the historical dimensions of reality. This level is one of primary importance in comparative religion in the West and has been a prominent science within Islamic civilization too. It thus makes sense to begin with history from both perspectives to which Shalabī is indebted. The order of the second and third chapters, in the same way as did Abū Zahrah for Christianity, sets the stage free of doubts: the *Qurʾān* enables the reader to see Judaism first through God's revelation in the *Qurʾān*, and then through other sources. The dichotomy is clear cut between Islam and the other sources, and the priority of the first over the second is an axiomatic *a priori* in Shalabī's hermeneutics[109]. The fourth chapter with its emphasis on the sources of Jewish thought, betrays the Islamic concern for verification of sources through the science of ascription and transmission lines (*isnād*) and their content (*matn*), which on both grounds can be proven to be the result of distortion (*inḥirāf*). The fifth chapter on legislation inevitably compares Jewish to Islamic law, whereby the concern for legislation is equally reflective of an

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[107]    It is possible to find several footnote references to Abū Zahrah's writings in Shalabī's books, especially in II, 49, 150, etc.

[108]    See especially the introduction to the seventh edition, which opens with *Allāhu Akbar*, and proclaims the 1973 October war as God's victory for Muslims. Shalabī uses the occasion to draw simplistic parallels with the Hyksos, the Crusaders and the Tatars. See I, 22.

[109]    It is reminiscent in some ways of the period of Scholasticism.

important component of Judaism in and of itself on the one hand, and of an Islamic subjectivity which would seek in any religion the legal dimension so important in Islam. Finally, through the title of his last chapter, Jews in darkness, Shalabī expresses more his own subconcious fears of Jews, than a reality *per se*. Through secret societies Jews are trying to control the world. This fiction of Jewish infiltration everywhere to control the world is reminiscent of a certain syndrome not uncommon in recent European and Western history. As the concluding chapter, it reflects the particular picture Shalabī wants to portray of Jews and Judaism. It also reveals to the daylight the hermeneutical foundation of much of Shalabī's polemical enterprise in the study of religion.

In the first chapter, 3,500 years of history are covered. Such a vast amount of material necessitates a selection. Shalabī's choices of main periods for Jewish history agree with much of Western scholarship on Jews. But he chooses to emphasize political rather than social history[110]. For this, Shalabī makes a broad use of Western scholarship on the Jews. However, at times he draws from Islamic sources as factual information too. For example, he writes:

> In the first century of the second millenium BCE, two groups went into Egypt, which history mixed up one with the other. These two groups are the Hyksos and the Hebrews. The Hyksos are the shepherds of the Amāliq and they are a tribe of the Arabs which the *Qur'ān* mentions in what follows: The wandering Arabs are more hard in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which Allah hath revealed unto His messenger (*sūrah* 9; 97). When they were calling to the faith, the Generous *Qur'ān* shouted at them: "The Bedouins say: 'We believe'. Say:'You believe not but rather say 'we surrender', for faith has not yet entered your hearts' (*sūrah ḥujarāh*; 14). Thus these shepherds struck the land of Egypt because of the drought in the Arabian peninsula. This was at the time of the disintegration of the thirteenth dynasty of the Pharaohs. The Hyksos were able to overthrow this dynasty and they took possession of

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[110] In the first six pages of geographical depiction, and even on page 77, Shalabī draws four maps of the area at different times in history. None shows the word Israel or Judah; only Palestine or Canaan is used. Moreover, his use of the world Palestine is ambiguous: it seems that it refers both to what geographically corresponds to today's State of Israel, or else to the whole of the lower South-West Asia. I, 40.

power in the Eastern Delta and they remained during four dynasties, that is, the fourteenth, fifthteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth.[111]

The logic of this passage fails me. First the *Qur'ān* does not refer to the Hyksos directly but to Bedouins in general. How can Shalabī apply this verse to Hyksos? He probably assumes that the Hyksos are Arabs and Bedouins[112], although he refers to no source on this matter. Or else he simply wants to give weight to his argument about the nature of the Hyksos by drawing a parallel with the *Qur'ān*, using it literally. This would indicate that it is possible for Shalabī to use the *Qur'ān* out of its historical context and even to apply it to ancient history.

In another instance, Shalabī does just the contrary. He refutes the popular literal interpretation of a passage and explains it historically[113]. Indeed, he rejects the interpretation by many Muslims who say that the 1973 war was forecast in *sūrah* 17:3-8. The two instances when Jews suffered terrible defeat happened before Islam according to Shalabī. But the essence of Gods' message is that these defeats and destructions were numerous throughout Jewish history. For Shalabī:

> this verse teaches the potentiality of the oppression of the sons of Israel another time, promising that God will bring down upon them what they deserve of punishment. And what the Jews did in the contemporary period in Palestine and in the Holy Shrine will make them return to darkness and oppression. We call on God to help us to expel them to take revenge from their confirming his promises, until there befalls upon our land the good [equivalent] to what befell upon it of opression and darkness.[114]

This homelitic excursus, placed between the description of Titus' destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and the Muslim conquest, reveals Shalabī's real intention. It is there not so much to rectify an erroneous popular belief as to explain the several upheavals in Jewish

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111     I, 51-52.
112     In fact the Hyksos invaded Egypt around 1750 BCE only and were a group of nomadic Asian peoples some of whose rulers had Semitic names. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, 405.
113     I, 88-90.
114     I, 90.

history as God's will. Thus Shalabī opens the way for his contemporary preoccupations to be ventilated in the midst of Jewish history.

Shalabī then turns the first Muslim conquest of Palestine in 636 CE into a righteous act of reconquest:

> And in 636 BC, Muslims conquered Palestine from the Byzantines. Since that historical time, Palestine became completely Arab, in blood and flesh, or say that its complete Arabness had come back to Palestine. For before it had known the Jews, it was Arab from the remains of the early Arab immigrants to it. Then the Jews acquired it over its inhabitants as we mentioned. Lastly the Islamic conquest came and gave back [the land] to its rightful owner and the poems of the pure Arabness raised anew.[115]

Shalabī's historic account becomes prey to a political ideology, sustained by an undercurrent of apologetics and polemics[116]. What is more dangerous is his making a particular group of people a scapegoat. Contemporary malaises are read back into history, as we have seen above[117]. This procedure can bring about such aberrations as: "it follows clearly from the study of these [Crusader] wars that the Jews were behind the Crusaders, that they were among the secret reasons which pushed the Crusaders to conquer the Holy Land"[118]. Historically, this is an unsubstantiated statement. The few historical facts we have convey the sufferings which befell the Jewish communities both in Europe and in the Holy Land due to the Crusaders[119].

But what is worst is that the reader ends this section on the history of Judaism with absolutely no sense of the growth and changes in the Jewish beliefs, practices and institutions over their long history. This fact might reflect Shalabī's own inability to see

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[115] I, 90.

[116] For several Muslim responses to history in the context of contemporary ideologies, see Y. Haddad, Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982).

[117] I, 93.

[118] I, 90-91.

[119] Stillman, op. cit., 61 and 75. F. E. Peters, Jerusalem, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 288-290.

historically the religious developments in the Islamic beliefs and practices, especially in their formative period.

In the last section of this first chapter, Shalabī writes about Judaism and Zionism. According to him, the first Zionist was Moses. Ever since, Zionists have been those who want to live in Palestine and those who help others live there. Thus Zionism has been in existence at all times of Jewish history, at least in theory, for after the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem in 135 CE, the Jewish presence there was almost eliminated. "And over time, there were all sorts of forced submissiveness in the countries where they lived and they participated in activities against them [the countries] as we mentioned before"[120]. With the Russian pogroms, the desire to return to the land of the ancestors starts anew. What Shalabī does not seem to understand is first that this desire had seen renewals at certain times in different centuries[121] and secondly that what made the attempt successful this time is the ideology of nationalism. The readers gain no sense of the secular dimension of Zionism. Rather, they gain the 'knowledge' that:

> with the beginning of the Zionist movement began wide destruction whose purpose was that the Jews control the world. Their decisions about Palestine are the decisions proclaimed at their conference in Basel. As for their secret decisions, they are included in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. [...] With the passing of time and during generations, the various Jews tried to have many non-Jewish leaders join their ranks, [...such as] Churchill, Truman and Eisenhower, [...]. The Zionist parade still goes on but the Arab and Muslim forces will curtail its threats and wage a war so that this backward parade retreat and so that a place for the Arabs who bear a message of love and peace may be established.[122]

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[120] I, 119.
[121] Shlomo Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 3-4.
[122] I, 124-125.

Shalabī's first chapter ends thus. His political aims are blatent, and he falls prey,

through his anti-zionism, to an anti-semitism[123] cloaked in Islamic garb[124]. There is not

even one reference to the Holocaust. It is a distortion of the history of Judaism, which

Shalabī claims to portray scientifically.

The next two chapters contrast on the one hand the Jewish beliefs as seen from an

Islamic perspective and on the other as seen from non-Islamic sources. This simple

division reminds the reader how some Muslims clearly distinguish between God's

revelation, which cannot be disputed in the eyes of a believing Muslim, and the rest of the

world which has not accepted the message of Islam. If what falls into the first category is

not necessarily truthful, it is approached positively. If what falls into the second category is

not necessarily false, it is approached with suspicion.

This simplistic dichotomy is operative in Shalabī's case. After assembling *Qurʾānic*

descriptions of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Aaron, David,

and Solomon, Shalabī writes: "

Now comes the role of recounting the beliefs of the sons of Israel. As the Generous
*Qurʾān* gave a good picture of the prophets of the sons of Israei, thus it talks about the
belief with which they were entrusted. Its picture is perfect and just and clear, and it does
not differ from the belief of Muslims.[125]

Shalabī ends this chapter saying that "we will see in the following chapter details of

distortion which the sons of Israel arrived at regarding the words of their prophets and their

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[123]    See especially Léon Poliakov, De l'antisionisme à l'antisémitisme, (Paris: Calmann-
Levy, 1969), 133-149.
[124]    For a presentation of the Jewish treatment in Islamic history, see Léon Poliakov,
Histoire de l'Antisémitisme, (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1961), especially vol. II "De Mahomet
aux Marranes".
[125]    I, 143.

beliefs". These quotes especially the last one, prove how operative the dichotomy Islam-other can be for Shalabī.

The third chapter begins with the same descriptive approach to the prophets as was used in the previous chapter. The only difference is that Shalabī now utilizes a variety of non-Muslim sources. He ends that section writing: "And so on and so forth. This quick, non-*Qurʾānic* picture of the prophets of the sons of Israel clarifies the orientation of the writers and researchers and especially the writers of the Bible on these prophets"[126]. In those descriptions, Shalabī uses relevant biblical passages which he then compares with quotes from different scholars emphasizing the contradictions and "distorted" nature of their contents. Then he moves to the second part:

> From a historical and factual point of view, it follows clearly that the sons of Israel neglected the true source of belief, which is heaven, they drifted behind other sources. The sons of Isreal went through dangerous events: they lived in Egypt, they stood in between the two gaps of a millstone in Palestine; they were exiled to Babylon; and the period of struggle between them and the countries; then in the period of exile they wrote the Old Testament and they compiled the Talmud and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, as we shall see in what follows. And this is what it became. These are real sources for the beliefs of Jews. And we will research in what follows the most imporant of the teachings of these beliefs.[127]

This context for an understanding of Jewish belief implicitly carries certain assumptions. The obvious one is that according to Shalabī the source of true belief is in heaven. The second one is that from a historical and factual point of view, a researcher concludes that a certain people neglected the true source of belief: heaven. Thus history is subordinate to faith, for how can one historically prove the existence of Heaven? Finally, there is the assumption that Shalabī knows what are the most important beliefs of Jews. More than assumptions, it also carries a judgement: Jewish beliefs are not true, for their

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[126]   I, 172.
[127]   I, 173.

sources are not from heaven. And the only way Shalabī can come to this conclusion is by letting his Islamic faith interfere in his writing about Judaism[128].

What are the most important beliefs of Jews according to Shalabī? God; the worship of God before during and after the temple; Judaism as a racist religion; the ark and the temple; priesthood and sacrifices; the chosen people and the Messiah; sects in Judaism. Firstly many of these elements are not beliefs as such. Secondly the choice of beliefs reflects a preference for ancient beliefs and practices rather than contemporary ones. This was unavoidable since Shalabī analyzes Judaism as he would Islam: taking the Holy Book as primary source and deducing from it what the religion is all about. There is no clear sense of historical layers of interpretation of these beliefs nor of the practices. More specifically, Shalabī reports incorrect information, some of which may be due to research which has now been superseded[129], some other, out of malevolence[130]. What Shalabī fails to acknowlege is the existing tension between the high ethical demands of the religion of the prophets and what the people practiced, as well as the different historical periods to which the *Torah* refers. One can doubt that Muslims would have been better than Jews at a time when polytheism and paganism were the norm and monotheism the exception. But the most damaging is Shalabī's assumption that Judaism means essentially what can be perceived in the *Torah*. The whole Rabbinic period which followed the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE is nowhere mentioned[131]. In fact, his analysis mixes

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[128] This thus directly violates the several claims he made that his own feelings and commitment to Islam do not interfere with his 'scientific' study of comparative religions.
[129] I, 176-177. On the origin of the word *yahweh* and its meaning, the late vocalization is incorrect.
[130] I, 173. Take the example of the Jewish worship of God which Shalabī claims is not the real God for "The sons of Israel were never able in any period of their history to abide in the worship of the one God which the prophets have called for. Their tendency for anthropomorphism, polytheism, utilitarianism is clear in the stages of its history."
[131] The best proof can be found in his description of Jewish sects, where only Pharisees, Sadduces, Karaites, Scribes, and the Extremists (which he links to the Assassins by way of a seriously deffective etymology). I, 218-225. Only Karaites represent a sect which played a very important role from the eighth century CE onwards.

his Islamic hermeneutics with the many Christian sources on Judaism which, especially 25

years ago or more, had not yet gone through the revolution of Vatican II which made room

for an approach to understanding Judaism the way Jews do (at least in theory), that is with

both Biblical and Rabbinical periods and even modernity. But such a revolution was made

possible through the development of biblical criticism, a process hardly begun even today in

the Muslim world[132].

The short preface to the fourth chapter reads thus:

> The first plan to this book was that it be a research on the "Old Testament" which
> would compare with the research which appeared in the book "Christianity" on the "New
> Testament". But with respect to the sources, I quickly decided that the "Old Testament"
> was not the only holy book for Jews. There are other sources which Jews have preserved
> as sacred and no less important than the "Old Testament". Because of this the title of this
> chapter was changed and it became "Sources in Jewish Thought" where the research will
> include words about the sources which the Jews consider holy and upon which they rely
> for direction. These sources are: the Old Testament, the Talmud and the Protocols of the
> Elders of Zion.[133]

This passage is very important insofar as it confirms that the book "Judaism" was written

after the book "Christianity". It also confirms the basic Christian theological influence

which until recently so clearly distinguished between the Old and the New Testaments in

Western scholarship, thus explaining why our previous chapters were so limited to the

Biblical period. What it does reveal though is that the fourth chapter did not previously

include discussions of the Talmud and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion[134]. It could

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[132] There are more and more examples of such Muslims though, such as Mahmoud Ayoub with his articles mentioned above and Mohammed Arkoun in two of the following writings among many others: Rethinking Islam Today, (Washington: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1987) and "The Notion of Revelation: From Ahl al-Kitāb to the Societies of the Book," Die Welt des Islam, 28(1988), 62-89, etc. However these Muslims tend to live in the West.

[133] I, 229.

[134] What it did include would be important to know, in order better to assess when exactly the idea of adding the more ideologically written sections on the Talmud and the Protocols surfaced. In the previous chapters only two passing references to Talmud are made: I, 214 and 219. Thus even after writing chapter four, the other three were probably left unchanged essentially.

indicate an important change in both Shalabī's conception that after all, Jews believed in the sacredness of more than the Old Testament, and his initial intentionality to provide "Judaism" as a counterpoint to "Christianity", as if in terms of holy books one could say: Old Testament = Judaism; New Testament = Christianity; as *Qurʾān* = Islam.

We shall extract one major element from Shalabī's description of the Old Testament[135]. Firstly,

> from the previous studies it has appeared to us how quickly the disintegration reached the sons of Israel after Moses. It has also appeared to us that the books of the Old Testament were written late, that is in the period of disintegration and disturbances. Their authors were not those to whom these books were ascribed, and revelation is not a source for these books. The clear result of all these introductions is that the Jews wrote the Torah reflecting their differences and their hopes. They built it with the aim of validating their own goals and from there the mistakes swarmed and came continuously in the Old Testament. Many are concerned with the presentation of the mistakes of the Old Testament and clarifying what there is in it of error and contradiction.[136]

From this paragraph, reminiscent of Abū Zahrah, the elements of writing at the time of disintegration are: lack of proper ascription and no revelation. All reflect valued criteria in the Islamic normativity. If many in the West itself are concerned with bringing out into the open these mistakes, then Shalabī must be on the right analytical path.

About the Talmud, Shalabī relies exclusively upon a French book written by a professor in Prague, Roeling (?), whose title is: "Treasures observed in the laws of the Talmud". It was translated into Arabic by Dr. Yūsuf Naṣr-Allāh, and also includes a document called "The Talmud: the Sharī'ah of Israel". Shalabī describes in the course of over 5 pages the following concepts; God , the Soul of Jews, Jews and authority, Jews and

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[135] It is important to note that on 261, Shalabī refers to Maspero, without any reference, saying that the number of years the Hebrews stayed in Egypt was not 430 (as in Exodus 34:2) but 210. This argument was taken directly from Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah.* Maspero's book where the passage can be found for comparison is in V. 5, 271 (or on the question of the Hyksos and Hebrews, 269).

[136] I, 260.

non-Jews; Jews and possessions; division in the Talmud; and finally, Jews and the Messiah. Shalabī protrays against the anti-semitic stereotypes through his preoccupation for Jews and: non-Jews (racism?), and possession (materialistic), and authority (discriptive?).

Shalabī devotes fourteen pages to the Protocoles of the Elders of Zion. He introduces the topic without attributing to them any clear date of composition. "They show evidences of the existence of a timely link between these protocols and the end of the nineteen century and of the existence of a link between these protocols and the Basel Conference of 1897"[137]. This weakness of speech gives away the unsubstantiated nature of the claim that these Protocols are a holy book for Jews. Such a view has been completely repudiated by scholarship long ago[138]. Suffice it to quote the last two propagandistic sentences of this chapter:

> This is a quick picture of these protocols from which appears what danger there is in them for individuals, nations and civilizations. Those who read these protocols with precision will understand that many of the dictatorial governments in the East are built upon its foundations and carry out its directives.[139]

The fifth chapter focuses on Jewish jurisprudence, portraying with clarity how Jews regard Moses as the Law giver from whom all Jewish laws subsequently derive. Shalabī

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[137] I, 272.

[138] In fact they have widely served the spread of antisemitism in Europe at the beginning of this century, among a population with probably similar levels of education we find today in Arab countries. They are presently sold as best sellers in some Arab countries I have visited, with the danger such lies and defamation may carry. For a detailed analysis and translation, see a book written by the publishers without any author, The Protocols and World Revolution including a translation and analysis of the Protocols of the Meetings of the Zionist Men of Wisdom, (Boston: Small & Maynard, 1920); also Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion, second edition, (London: "the Britons", 1920). Both are translations from S. Nilus' book, first published in Russian in the city of Tsarkoye Selo in 1905. See also Leon Poliakov, "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion," Encyclopaedia Judaica, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 582-583.

[139] I, 286.

discusses the ten commandments and the several laws which can be found directly in the

*Torah.*

We now want to bring forth examples of some laws related to important questions such as the status of women in Judaism, slavery, confession, inheritance, interest, interdictions in marriage, etc. We based ourselves to verify these questions on a detailed Jewish bibliography. It will enable us for some of these questions to make a comparison between laws in Judaism and laws in Islam.[140]

These themes reflect either specific Islamic concerns, or concerns close to an apologetic discourse. Only the topic of confession refers more directly to Christianity. Amost all these themes come back in Shalabī's third book "Islam".

Finally, the last chapter on the Jews in Darkness, seems to be an addition to the 1984 seventh edition[141]. This chapter would represent a fascinating study in and of itself. It begins thus:

The Jews have played a major role in secrecy to realize their aims. This role is no less than the role they have played in publicity. The range of this role has widened to include conspiracy and assassination. It included spying and the kindling of revolutions, and other kinds of treachery. And in this chapter, we will mention the broad plans for these great events.[142]

According to Shalabī, these plans include the infiltration and control of several organizations such as: information media, several religions ("they entered Buddhism, Christianity and Islam"[143]), Templars, Rosicrucians, Aḥmadīyah, Ismāʿīlīyah, Masonry, Rotary, Lions, Yoga and Bahāʾis. The rationale behind such a thesis stems more from paranoia that actual facts. For example, in the Rotary section of 14 pages, only two references appear. The first one refers to another book of Shalabī. The second refers to the meaning of Carmate. From Philip Hitti who defines carmate as 'secret teacher'[144], Shalabī

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140     I, 294-295.
141     I, 23.
142     I, 309.
143     I, 316.
144     P. Hitti, <u>History of the Arabs</u>, (London: Macmillan, 1963, eighth edition), 158.

jumps to make of Carmates some Jews... The argumentation lacks any historical logic. *Qurʾānic* and Biblical references are used as evidences of Jewish behavior, as if one could apply what was written more than a thousand years ago to our contemporary situation[145]. Shalabī represents a pseudo-historical method whose results are devoid of any historical reality.

The two closing paragraphs of Shalabī's book "Judaism" clearly indicate his underlying purpose for such a book within the series as a whole. Furthermore it carries the implicit contradiction between a definite judgement on certain religions and the supposedly neutral quest for science and knowlege. He thus disguises into a pseudo-scientific method the real polemical nature of his whole enterprise.

So the Jews allocated tothemselves or had the Imperialists allocate to them our Arab land. Religion was their means to realize this tragedy. Around us, in Africa and Asia, revolves a long struggle between the missionary religions (which are Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). But the imperialists are frightened of Islam and are afraid of it. They began to mobilize efforts against it. So the imperialists have been able to cover themselves up in the false moderation called Christianity, which is in reality very far from the Christianity of Jesus. The Christian imperialists have met with the atheists and the apostates in this field. Then the Jews have united with this group in order to be granted what Jewish thought was used to of cheep gains over the account of the Arabs and the Muslims. And by way of Judaism, forms of falsehood and darkness named Bahāʾism, Rotary and Masonry burst forth in the land of Muslims.

But the troops of truth will march and will surpass the difficulties. They will overcome falsehood and all what is hoped the Muslims will uncover about their enemies. [...] Perhaps in this and in the other books of this series "Comparative Religions" is what invalidates this falsehood and sends rays of science and knowlege to the student of science and knowledge.[146]

Shalabī devotes a whole book to Christianity. In this regard, Ayoub writes: "[Dr. Shalabī] displays in his book, Christianity, neither a high level of political thinking nor

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[145] He uses *Qurʾanic* verses as supporting arguments 8 times in this section, and Biblical verses 3 times.

[146] I, 360.

rigorous scholarship. Therefore it may be more useful to follow the argument of Abū Zahrah and refer to Shalabī only where he presents important points setting forth his own view.[147] Since we have dealt at length with Abū Zahrah on Christianity and since Shalabī has used Abū Zahrah as one of his main sources, it is sufficient to emphasize Ayoub's conclusions and add where need be.

There is indeed very little difference between both authors' descriptions of Christianity. Their tendency to demythologize Jesus and play down the miraculous aspect of his life represents influences from classical Islamic hagiography and from Christian christological theology, especially protestant Biblical scholarship for Shalabī. Both use traditional *Qur'ānic* exegesis (*tafsīr*) and the Gospel of Barnabas to refute Christians' belief in the resurrection of Jesus. The similarities go on and on. What differs is not their purpose, for both used traditional Christian disagreements as weapons for refutation rather than methodological styles. What differs is their style. Abū Zahrah remains in fact more rigorous than Shalabī, despite Shalabī's greater use of scientific techniques. This difference can easily be imputed to their respective histories, Shalabī having studied for years in England while Abū Zahrah did not. Another distinction is their tone. Abū Zahrah remains on the whole calm and tediously develops his argument, although he does fall into diatribes for some few pages[148]. As for Shalabī, his tone continues to be pretentious and at times condescending. In his concluding paragraph he writes:

I undertook this study on Christianity, with the spirit of equity and the clarity of the truth, as far as possible. I aimed that it be a scientific research, following the intellect and logic, not sentiment and feelings. It is hoped that I have been right in what I intended for it and that it follows clearly for us from this study that Christianity went far beyond its purity. Strange and bizarre elements entered it until it moved away from its nature and the nature of all the revealed religions. It was a declaration to send a new prophet with a new message to save the world from what befell it of misfortunes and afflictions and to lay the complete and righteous foundation for religious and wordly affairs. And hereby Muḥammad came and

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147     Mahmoud Ayoub, "Some Muslims views of Christianity," *op. cit.*, 29.
148     LC, 96-101.

hereby came the message of Islam to which we devoted the third part of this series "Comparative Religions".[149]

Shalabī's third book "Islam" was translated into English under the title "Islam: Belief-Legislation-Morals"[150]. It summarizes three of the most important sectors in the religion of Islam, which in Arabic are called: ʿaqīdah, sharīʿah and akhlāq. They represent the normative Islamic framework through which Shalabī perceives reality, and thus they constitute a primary source for his hermeneutics. The way in which Shalabī presents his own religion serves as much to understand his own Islamic beliefs as to learn about his subjectivity in the study of religion[151]. However, since his book seems to have been written for a non-Islamic audience, the resulting content is simplistic and the style purely polemical with the obvious aim of refuting other faiths, proving the superiority of Islam and hoping that the non-Muslim readers will convert to Islam.

Now we had better try hard to explain Islam in the era of light that has enveloped the Muslim World, in the era of trouble that prevails among humanity nowadays. What we believe is that it is only Islam that prescribes the remedy for the problems and sufferings that have befallen humanity. [...] Embracing Islam, at present, fosters belief that Islam is the religion of the future. This is realized by every researcher in the spread of religion. There is no doubt that the efforts of Christian missionaries are very near to failure, [...] whereas the religion of Islam spreads and flourishes without anyone knowing its advocates and without joint efforts to serve it. Islam spread in the periods of darkness. So one can imagine what it would do in the periods of light.[152]

My God! Realize, through this book, my sincere aspirations of introducing Islam to those who are in search of light, truth and guidance.[153]

Polemics apart, the book reveals certain important elements for our analysis of a Muslim's point of view on the study of religion. Shalabī sets his book in the context of

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[149]   II, 277.
[150]   See section 3.3, page 41 note 1 for details on the difference between the Arabic and English versions.
[151]   For a hierarchical listing of the most important beliefs in Islam for Shalabī, see III, 144-145.
[152]   III, 20-21.
[153]   III, 23.   See also 181.

humanity as a whole, which definitely opens a new era in Muslim heresiography. He also combines the Islamic concept of progressive revelation with the Spencerian/Darwinian evolutionary theory[154]. Although the logical argumentation is weak and simplistic, it does point towards a process of appropriation and subsequent Islamization of some European concepts. Indeed the four first chapters model such a theory, with titles such as: Evolution of the Prophet's Missions with the Development of the Human Race; Humanity's Long Night (which includes brief surveys on Judaism, Christianity, Life in Persia, the Religions of China, India and the Arabs); Dawn; Call in Balance (Muḥammad's mission). Yet this possibility to perceive reality in larger terms, both geographically (all the earth's peoples and religions, at least in theory) and historically (going back further than ever in humanity's past), does not necessarily imply any change in conceptualization. Shalabī continues to integrate the new information into an already well conceptualized Islamic framework. Thus we find Shalabī writing: "It may be truly said that revealed religions have been concentrated in the Middle-East for this reason, as this area had witnessed the most advanced civilizations since the oldest times"[155]. Thus Shalabī's new advances in terms of the scope he is willing to encompass do not correspond to any new advance in conceptual thinking. Indeed, his polemics are considered by Mahmoud Ayoub a retrogression to the apologetics of Muḥammad ᶜAbduh and Rashīd Riḍāʾ[156], who were pioneers in opening up Islamic tradition to modernity.

The impression of a retrogression in logical argumentation is further evidenced in the next four chapters, which fall under the general category of ᶜaqīdah, belief; Allāh (God);

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[154] III, 24. The evolutionary imagery Shalabī uses for humanity is that of a human being's growth: primitiveness and simplicity to maturity. He does not say complexity though. This was borrowed from Muḥammad ᶜAbduh in *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*. See also Muḥammad al-ᶜAqqād, *mā yuqāl ᶜan al-islām*, (Cairo: maktabah dār al-ʾurubah, [?]), 53.

[155] III, 26.

[156] M. Ayoub, *op cit.*, 60-61. Shalabī's chapters on "The Spread of Islam: Between Call and Force," "Women in Islam" and "Slavery" are all examples of apologetic discourse.

Prophethood; the Soul and Matter in Islamic Thought; and No Monasticism in Islam[157].

Indeed, as the titles are, so is the content: sporadic and ecclectic. Shalabī dabbles in a

mixture of methods: comparative[158], philosophical syllogisms[159], historical[160], etc. All

methods are subvervient to proving how great Islam is. In the process, Shalabī makes a

series of illogical[161] and unsubstantiated claims, such as the following. The question

Shalabī tries to answer is: "Why were the pre-Islamic Missions Private and Mohammed's

Universal?"[162]. Shalabī seems to contradict himself in his very question, as not only Islam

is universal since he acknowleges that Buddhism and Christianity are also missionary

religion. Unless Shalabī distinguishes between universal and missionary in its outlook,

then there is contradiction. But since he seems to make a distinction, then let us quote his

argument:

> As for Muhammad's mission, it was natural that it should be universal, as the two
> previously mentioned reasons are out of question with the call. The world is no longer
> divided into regions, each living in isolation from the other as means of communication
> now connect all parts of the world together. Besides, the learning of foreign languages is
> now so widely spread that the different nations can get in touch with one another and,
> consequently, it has become easy for one mission to spread among the whole of mankind.
> Moreover, most of the nations have been given access to some degree of culture as a result
> of the diffusion of printing and the removal of teachers and students to all parts of the
> world, due to the easy means of transport, thus leading to an exchange of culture and to a

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[157] As for the chapter on "No Monasticism in Islam", it is there to contrast the beliefs discussed in the previous and in the following section on the legal dimensions of Islam. Shalabī proves his lack of knowledge about Christian monasticism as well as about Judaism: "Therefore, they resorted to monasteries synagogues and caves making monasticism and a life of celibacy their law. Such a group should be ignored by Islam as their conduct is unnatural." III, 197.

[158] As one example, see the passage 158-160. The whole chapters on "A Glimpse on the Political Institution in Islam" (III, 375-396) and "A Glimpse on the Economic Organization in Islam" (III, 397-413) are also cases in point.

[159] For example: III, 101-134.

[160] For one example among many, see: III, 154-158.

[161] See III, 291. Or else contrast these two statements: "The degree of superiority of the man [over the woman] is necessary whenever there is divergence of opinion" (331) and "Islam has put an end to the discrimination between man and woman in all the common values. It has also put an end to any legal discrimination between them in public rights. It has made woman equal to man in all these affairs."

[162] III, 154.

breaching of the wide gulf between the thoughts and cultures of the different nations of the world. All this was a herald to the sending of one Prophet to all mankind.[163]

This is not the only example where Shalabī appropriates the developments which emerged out of modernity for Islamic civilization[164].

Moreover, his lack of historical acuity can also lead to a blind avoidance of historical facts, or to a biaised presentation altogether, such as:

At present, you see non-Muslims in Islamic societies enjoy the great rights secured to them by Islam, and take delight in the cooperation, friendliness and good companionship for which Muslims are reputed. You go round the Islamic world, but you scarcely hear any complaint of a Christian or a Jew against his Muslim compatriot. [...] As for the presence of Muslims living under non-Muslim governments, it shows great pains, cruelty, deprivation, deportation and bitter struggle. Muslims have undergone all this in Israel, so much so that they deserted their homes and have not been allowed to return to them.[165]

Shalabī's black and white depictions and his lack of any self-criticism lead us to suggest that he is blinded by his missionary zeal[166]. Indeed, he even goes so far as to conclude his book with a chapter borrowed from the biography of a researcher on religions who converted to Islam[167]. Fortunately, Shalabī's historical and logical capacities are much more evident in his fourth book of the series "Comparative Religions".

In his fourth book "The Great Religions of India", Shalabī first gives an overview of India, its geography people, languages, as well as a brief overview on cow worship and deities of natural phenomena. In this introduction, Shalabī follows a pseudo-historical concept of progress. For him, the human instinct, confronted by the forces of nature, developed totemic ideas, which later gave rise to polytheism. Shalabī chooses to stress two such forms of worship: the worship of the Lingam, the God of procreation and that of the

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[163]    III, 155-156.  A rather anachronistic statement!

[164]    III, 255.  According to Shalabī, the fact that the United Nations meets once a year is derived from Islamic teachings.  On 374: "the abolition of slavery is one of the gifts presented to humanity by Islam".

[165]    III, 239-240.  See also 242: "As for the non-Muslims in Islamic societies, history has witnessed how they enjoy prosperity security and safety under Islam".

[166]    For some example, see III, 314, 387 and 396, 413, etc.

[167]    III,   421-426.

Cow. He gives concrete examples of prayers to the Cow and quotes Gandhi who supposedly counted himself among the worshippers of the cow[168]. Afterwards, Shalabī adds the general characteristics of Hinduism, such as tolerance for diversity, most widespread religion in India, interconnectedness of all aspects of life. Finally, Shalabī ends his introduction with a brief historical classification: the first Vedic period (15th-6th BCE), period of heterodoxy (6th-3rd c. BCE) and the second Vedic period (3rd c. BCE - ?). "So our study in this book will include the greatest characteristic traits in Indian thought comprising three religions: Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, as well as studies on the sacred books of the Indians"[169].

Any introduction to the Indian subcontinent poses a significant challenge due to the vast amount of material and the tremendous varieties of everything. This challenge was well taken up by Shalabī on the whole, but his biases emerge in three more specific instances: the emphasis on the worship of the sacred cow; the description of natural dieties; and his reference to Urdu. The worship of the cow is given much space in this short introduction (4 out of 17 pages), which is supposed to introduce the whole of India. And even in these four pages, no effort is made to empathize with the rational elements which explain in part why the cow became sacred. As for the simple presentation of the natural deities. it is done in such a way as to be reminiscent in a Muslim reader's mind of pre-Islamic Arabia. In the case of Urdu, why should it occupy half of a one and a half page presentation on languages in India? Shalabī not only describes that language but also states his astonishment at the attack which Urdu has suffered in recent history. Albeit a valid claim, it has no place in a general introduction which hardly even mentions Sanskrit! So in an introduction which seeks to present a historical view of the development of pluralism in

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[168] For a more pragmatic explanation of Gandhi's respect for the cow, see M. K. Gandhi, An Autobiography, (Ahmedabad: The Navajivan Trust, first edition 1927), 355 (1983 edition).
[169] IV, 40.

India, such emphases attract the attention of the reader to certain points outside their real historical proportion. Indeed, it is precisely this lack of historical balance (and even accuracy) which is so characteristic of Shalabī. He begins with India's ancient history[170] and jumps at times to contemporary issues with quotes from Mahatma Gandhi. Furthermore, his last classification ends in the 3rd c. BCE, as if not much more happened afterwards. Obviously it is impossible to cover the whole of Indian religions' history. But a clearer acknowledgement of the boundaries of one's analysis would have been less misleading for the unaware reader.

Shalabī covers Hinduism in 65 pages, which he divides in 8 sections plus a short introduction and concluding assessment. The description reflects Shalabī's own mindset. A parallel presentation of his chapter structure on Hinduism with corresponding Islamic elements is revealing:

|  | Hinduism: | Corresponding Islamic elements: |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Veda | *Qurʾān* |
| 2. | God in Hindu thought | God in Islamic thought (monotheism) |
| 3. | Caste system | Islamic equality |
| 4. | Most important Hindu beliefs | Most important Islamic beliefs (*ʿaqāʾid*) |
| 5. | Hindu ethics | Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) |
| 6. | Hindu jurisprudence | Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) |
| 7. | Hindu sacred books (after the Veda) | *Sunnah* |
| 8. | Historical glance on the Hindu religion | Historical glance at the Islamic religion |

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[170] Shalabī tends to write in a factual way, as if most of what he says is plain truth. There is little room for expressing doubts and the many controversies which surround any historical account, especially with regard to periods so far remote as ancient Indian history.

There is no doubt that some of the core elements of Islam include Monotheism, the *Qur'ān* (which implies Muḥammad's prophethood), the *Sunnah* (or tradition of the Prophet), the *sharī'ah* (laws), justice (which implies equality), ethics (*akhlāq*), etc. Through all these, God is seen by Muslims as acting in history. It would not be surprising then to find Shalabī seeking these elements or their equivalent in Hinduism, whether consciously or not. The above parallel table validates this argument. So except perhaps for item three (caste system/Islamic equality), the order of classification of what is most important in Hinduism according to Shalabī represents, in fact, the Islamic divisions of what is considered important in Islam.

If we take a closer look at the content, we first find that Shalabī bases his description of the Veda principally on the writing of Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām. According to him, the Veda is divided into four religious books: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda, each one divided into four parts: Samhita, Brahman, Aranyaka and Upanishad. This simplified division is not really correct. The four last parts are not present in each Veda, but rather represent different styles of composition. Then Shalabī gives examples from the Veda: one hymn to Indra, the God of Gods, a short prayer to the Sun and two to Agni, God of the fire. These examples complement the earlier references in the introduction, stressing how the natural phenomena are being worshipped[171]. In the section on God in Hindu thought, Shalabī claims that "There is in Hindu thought as regards God, two completely different types: the monotheist type and the polytheist type, the second of which is stronger and more widespread"[172]. In the midst of this polytheism, some Hindus were still inclined towards something close to monotheism, which became a fixed belief with time. Around the ninth century BCE, under the influence of this emerging monotheism, there was a movement to organise the Gods into a hierarchy, whose head

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[171]    IV,   49-50.
[172]    IV,   51.

became a trinity. In the Veda, we find Varuna, Andra and Agni. Elsewhere, we find: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva[173]. Shalabī concludes: "Thus the Hindu priests opened the door for the Christians in what is called: the trinity in unity and the unity in trinity"[174]. This passing comment reveals much about Shalabī's intentions as mentioned before.

Hinduism remains though, for the most part, a religion in which several Gods are worshipped. Sculptures are built and then treated like human beings, receiving the best of all offerings. Some see them as real Gods, others as symbols. Apart from major public ceremonies, Shalabī describes how the prayers are repeated three times a day, often at home. He is careful to mention the laws of cleanliness, fasting and special bodily positions, which accompany worship, as is the case also in Islam. There is a wide variety of celebrations. For some reason, in this chapter on celebrations, Shalabī reports two creation stories, the first on how Brahma emerged out of nothing, creating everything out of his will. The second is about the spirit of creation which becomes the primitive human being as he yells "haʾnadha", upon finding something apart from him[175]. Since that day the word "anā", "I" exists. In his loneliness, the primitive human being divided himself into two, the second part becoming a woman. The cycle of human creation has existed ever since. Why Shalabī relates these two stories is unclear. But the second story is exactly the same as the one found in the dialogue of Plato[176]. Would Shalabī be subtly implying that Plato borrowed from pagan India?

Up to now, Shalabī has described the Gods of all the Hindus of the four major Hindu castes. But there were some other people in India in those early times who had a

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173  IV, 52.
174  IV, 52.
175  IV, 56.
176  It is possible to find the core of this story in Plato's dialogue with Timaeus in The Great Books of the Western World, ed. R. Maynard Hutchins, (London: Encyclopeadia Britannica, 1952), Vol. 7 "Plato", 452c-454a, 466a-467d.

special religion: the untouchables. These peoples ante-dated the Aryan invasions and were

not allowed to mix in with the Aryans. They were mistreated throughout the centuries. But

with Christian missionaries using this opportunity to their advantage, the Hindus, for fear

of seeing the number of conversions to other faiths increase, the Hindus had to improve

their behavior towards the untouchables. This passage is again an example of Shalabī's

mindset. "Thus Christian missionary sects took this opportunity and penetrated deeply into

the communities of untouchables calling them to enter Christianity. As for Muslims, to my

regret, there were very limited efforts to present Islam to these untouchables, and the

struggle still goes on."[177]

The next section deals with the caste system, which includes four main categories:

Brāhmaṇs, or priests, the Rājanyas or Kṣatriyas, rulers and leaders in war, Vaiśyas, the

traders and farmers, and Śūdras, the servants of the other three classes. Shalabī's

contention is that this caste system did not develop out of the necessities of life or the

division of labour, but rather out of the necessities of power and rulership which the

Aryans safeguarded for themselves through such a caste system[178]. It is clear that for

Shalabī, "the caste system has its sources in race and the rulership of race more than

anything else"[179]. He later concludes that this caste system is so ingrained in India that

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[177]    IV, 58.
[178]    IV, 58-59.
[179]    IV, 59. This opinion of Shalabī should be compared with the passages in his book "Islam" where he vehemently explains how Islam is against racism. Shalabī defines the four caste levels, using quotes from the laws of Mano. It is very interesting to notice that, in the midst of a section on castes, he reflects on Sikhism, "which was founded to create a common religion out of Hinduism and Islam" (IV, 64) as a religion which rejected at first the caste system, although it soon became a new caste of its own. This brief passage on Sikhism does not do justice to the specific character of Sikhism as a religion and the theological challenge it poses to Muslims in particular. Nor does Shalabī's later passage (IV, 104-106) which reduces Sikhism to an abortive attempt to try to unite Hinduism with Islam (IV, 105). His brief history is faulty. Indeed, he jumps from Guru Nanak in the 15th century to Govind two centuries later. And he claims the possibility that there be a link between the religion of the Emperor Akbar and such renovation attempts as Sikhism.

even Gandhi with all his efforts was unable successfully to implement the end of the caste system[180].

Shalabī elaborates four of the most important Hindu beliefs: karma, metempsychosis (*tanāsukh* or *tijwāl al-rūḥ* ), liberation (*intilāq* ) and pantheism (*waḥdat al-wujūd* ). "We will expose in what follows the opinion of Hindus on all of these beliefs"[181]. Karma is the doctrine by which every human act is accounted for and the bad and good alike rewarded accordingly. But since not all actions can be rewarded or punished during a lifetime, there developed the need to account for injustices which were not repaired by the time a person died. Thus developed the doctrine of metempsychosis according to Shalabī. The soul leaves the body at death although it remains linked to the material world. It must then start to repay for the deeds of the previous life. Hindus talk of a subtle body for the soul. In fact, the only point of contact between Hinduism and the Semitic religions is the immortality of the soul and the accountability of human actions[182]. For Hindus, the ultimate goal in life is not good over bad, paradise over hell, but liberation from all human desires, to blend in Brahma. So Shalabī ends this paragraph with a subtle conclusion of his own: "the reproach is to be levelled against this principle that Sufism, asceticism and passivity become better than righteousness of actions, that it be the way to God, while righteousness of actions results in a new cycle in life in which the soul is rewarded according to the good it did in the previous cycle."[183] As for the doctrine of pantheism, Shalabī summarizes Muḥammad ᶜAbd al-Salām's and Muḥammad ᶜAlī Ḥāfiẓ's points of view. The first writes that metempsychosis is the result of a three stage development: from reaching God through worship and sacrifice, through observation of creation's external appearances, finally

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[180]  IV, 65.

[181]  IV, 65.

[182]  In the midst of such descriptions, Shalabī does not miss the occasion to mention that the philosophy of metempsychosis was upheld by a small number of Muslims. Shalabī quotes Ibn Ḥazm on the matter and fully agrees that "the doctrine of metempsychosis is allegations and legends without any proof" (IV, 69).

[183]  IV, 70.

through the sacrifice of one's own self. The second, Ḥāfiẓ, stresses that the soul is what

lives, not the body. When the soul abstracts itself from material appearances, it begins its

return to the great Soul, God, Brahma[184].

Then, according to Shalabī, the Vedanta philosophy of Śankarāchārya (c.788-c.820)

further developed the concept of pantheism in 8th c. India. It was taken over by some

Sufis, such as the famous al-Ḥallāj (c.858-922), or else , according to al-Shahrastānī, Ibn

Sabāʾ, a Jewish convert to Islam who tried to deify ʿAlī. These two examples taken from

al-Shahrastānī and Ibn Ḥazm give Muslim parallels to the concept of pantheism in such a

way as to take away from the Hindu notion much of its uniqueness. It subtly sends the

message that such a doctrine is false and that it belongs to the fringe in Islam, leading only

to deification of man, an obvious heresy in Islam.

The following section deals with images of ethics among Hindus. Most of his text

(p.73-76) quotes the laws of Manu, the books of professor Atreya and some passages from

the book of 'Yoga wasistha'[185]. As for Hindu jurisprudence, Shalabī relies upon the Manu

Dharma Sastra which he describes as "a comprehensive book which includes the laws

which Hindu sects follow"[186]. It is interesting that Shalabī chooses only examples

pertaining to Kings, Women and economic questions. Here again the apologetic bias of

Shalabī emerges in his choices. Shalabī then describes some of the most important Hindu

Holy books. And since "we have already discussed both of these [the Veda and the Laws

of Mano] from which we extracted enough to see their important points, so there remains to

introduce four other books which are considered the top among Hindu holy books, and

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184    IV, 71.
185    This is the way it is latinized in IV, 75.
186    IV, 76.

these books are: Mahābhārata[187], Gītā, Yoga Wasistha and Rāmāyana"[188]. From the

Mahābhārata, he concludes that:

> These are examples of the stories in which Gods participated and the Mahabharata recorded, and, as we said, above that in it are blended rules, laws and customs. The drinking of wine became sinful after Sukar Ajarya was cheated on its account. And it is the role of Sukar Ajarya to caution about wine[...].[189]

If there is such a blend, why is there a need to talk about rules and regulations? And why

end with a reference to wine more specifically?

In his historical glance at the Hindu religion, Shalabī does not give a historical

overview of Hinduism. He simply contrasts his narrow understanding of Hinduism with

Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam (the longest part) and Sikhism. He summarizes

Hinduism as:

> a religion of monotheism on the one side and of polytheism on the other, as we said earlier. You can see in it primitive thoughts such as worship of the powers of nature, ancestor worship, and worship of the cow in particular. Hinduism rose when the Brahmans joined together in the eighth century [BCE]. They restored the belief in their religion, they established the school of Brahmanism and they declared the worship of Brahma. Hinduism used to mean the caste system, metempsychosis and pantheism. And among the most important things it meant was the presentation of sacrifices although it completed this presentation with a submission to Brahma and his blessing. And without the sacrifices the souls of the dead disappeared and the glory of the family died out completely. [...].[190]

Then under the challenge of Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism developed the laws of

Manu, which foster more preoccupation with rituals and the outward form than with the

actual worship of God, since God becomes immanent in all things. When Christianity

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[187]    'Mahapharta' is the English spelling Shalabī gives (IV, 81).    Can this be a simple typing mistake, especially when this word appears in a title?    If it is, it means that Shalabī lacks a sense of precision and accuracy.    If it is not a spelling mistake, than it means that Shalabī is not so familiar with Hinduism as he should be.

[188]    IV, 80.    In fact, the Mahābhārata represents the six book collection of the eighteen cantos of Sanskrit verse which make up the Bhagavadgītā.    Thus the two are synonymous. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, 163.

[189]    IV, 85.

[190]    IV, 99.

reached India, via the Nestorians, it did convert some Hindus. According to Shalabī, this fact became the basis from which the Western Christians further developped their missionary activities among the Hindus. "However the results of Christian mission in both cases were not very successful"[191]. As for the coming of Islam to India, "through the successive waves of Arab, Afghan, Turkish and Mughal invasions, and because Islam had easy precepts, Islam spread widely and quickly in India [..]"[192]. But the influences on both sides were great. Shalabī gives a few examples: the Ismaᶜīlīs, the Aḥmadīs and the followers of Muᶜīn al-Dīn Chhistī[193]. "These distortions were but the results of influences from Hinduism"[194]. There is no doubt that the Aḥmadīs developed within the context of India, and thus were influenced by the Indian milieu. But the Ismaᶜīlīs' development is much more complicated and cannot be understood only on the basis of Indian influences, which only really affected the community as a whole from the 19th century onwards, when Aga Khan I moved to India[195].

Shalabī borrows his conclusion and writes that:

Considering that India was influenced by external thought and the nature of that influence, Ryland resolved that India reached out by way of commerce and wars in Iran, Persia and in the heart of Asia (Burma, China, Sumatra, Java), Greece and Rome, but its interaction of thought was very weak. Indeed the constitution of India has always encircled Hindu thought with a wall so that nothing escapes from it or nothing foreign penetrates into it. And except for Buddhism, India did not send out anything of its thought or of its philosophy.[196]

Such an opinion is convenient to Shalabī insofar as it would sustain his argument that

Hinduism is essentially parochial and unlikely to have influenced Islam in any meaningful

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191    IV, 101.

192    *Ibid.*

193    This reference seems to indicate that Sufism too was considered by Shalabī as a distortion.

194    IV, 102.

195    Encyclopedia of Islam, first edition, Vol. III, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1913-1936), 551.

196    IV, 106.

way[197]. Moreover, by the nature of its local calling, it would automatically fall far away

from the universal message of Islam. In his final assessment of Hinduism, Shalabī repeats

the many stereotypes about Hinduism, which only proves his distance, both physical and

intellectual, from the world of Hinduism. The important aspects he choses to underline are:

the magic in their worship, the ancestor worship, the caste system, the passivity, the early

arranged marriages, the incineration of dead bodies and the individual's lack of importance.

All these aspects, although still present in Hinduism nowadays, are not the most important

goals of the religious edifice, or the religious cosmos, that Hindus have built for making

sense of the world. Indeed, these themes reflect much more the contrasts which the

inevitable encounter between a follower of Islam and a devotee of Hinduism brings out.

Furthermore, there are a few passages well worth quoting as examples of Shalabī's

subjectivity:

> Hinduism is reproached for its profound passivity, the tolerance which reaches the degree of contentment in injustice and sometimes it is considered as a virtue. But the exaggeration in it reduces it to comprehensive vise.[198]

> The Hindu prefers isolation and poverty. Philosophy in Hinduism is a spiritual training which requires of people to purify themselves and their surroundings more than it requires them to think. The relation between the philosopher and the scholar is but a relation of magic and versatility.[199]

> Hinduism is the religion of wisdom and because of the wisdom in Hinduism, the Greeks were influenced by it when they went to India and got in touch with its culture. And the wisdom of Hinduism is able to offer the culture of the contemporary epoch good and useful elements. Some researchers are of the opinion that the attainments of Hinduism in terms of wisdom are greater than its attainments in terms of spirituality.[200]

> Nevertheless, Hinduism will be forced to bow its head before the thoughts which resist her orientations now, the future will not protect any one of its communities and perhaps the caste system will be the quickest Hindu system to disappear.[201]

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[197] The influence on Sufism does not count since Sufism is probably considered by Shalabī as a distortion, if we are to understand 'the followers of Muʿīn al-Dīn Chistī' stated earlier as representative of all Sufis.

[198] IV, 107.

[199] IV, 107-108.

[200] IV, 108.

[201] Ibid.

It is possible to see the clear bias which Shalabī upholds against the Hindu caste system especially. Secondly, in his usage of the word Hinduism alone, he implies the religion with all its polytheistic aspects. When he refers to the higher levels of Hindu understanding, he calls it the Hindu philosophy. It should be noted that Shalabī clearly distinguishes between the concept of philosopher (*faylasūf*) and that of scholar, or person of knowlege (*ᶜālim*). Such a distinction in our opinion is totally inadequate as regards to Hinduism. In fact, such a distinction is purely Islamic, insofar as the *ᶜālim* implies a Muslim who is knowlegeable about Islam and whose reason remains subordinate to Islamic faith, while the *faylasūf* (philosopher) implies a person who pursues knowledge under the impulse of reason only.

Shalabī is the only one of our authors to discuss Jainism (22 pages). He sets the stage for the appearance of Jainism in the 6th century, together with Buddhism. At that time, the arbitrary absolutism of the Brahman class caused great social instability and dissatisfaction within the Hindu religious system. Shalabī considers both Buddha and Mahāvīra's lives as the primary focii for two revolutions. He begins with that of Mahāvīra.

Shalabī goes in detail to recount Mahāvīra's life, how he first got married for his parents' sake and when he was thirty, finally asked for the permission to go into a life of absolute chastity and purity. This was done after his parents had died, in respect for their wish. The biographical account of Mahāvīra is on the whole accurate, although Shalabī should have indicated that most of his information was entangled in much legendary material. The biography is followed, although it might have been preceded, by a short section on the 24 *tīrthankaras*. Let us compare how the topic is introduced by Shalabī and by a Western scholar.

The Jains believe that Jainism is a very ancient doctrine and that it has been completed through 24 Jains. The first Jain's name was ṛṣabha. He appeared in a far away period of time, and history did not preserve anything about him, and but a few legends are connected to him.[202]

In contrast, Niels C. Nielsen writes:

> Jains reject the Western scholars' claim that Mahāvīra was the founder of Jainism and instead trace the *tīrthaṅkaras* to prehistoric times. According to the Jain's theory, there were twenty-four *tīrthaṅkaras* in all, beginning with ṛṣabha, who lived for 8.4 million years.[203]

The tone of Shalabī in this case seems more sympathethic to Jain history than that of

Nielsen. Nielsen opposes Jains beliefs and their sense of symbolic history (which he calls

theory) to "Western scholar claims". In contrast, Shalabī plainly states in a factual manner

that history did not preserve anything about the origins of Jainism, accept for a few legends.

The resulting message is the same: yet the style implies a difference in methodological

presuppositions. It seems that Shalabī's faith in timeless realities not necessarily

corroborated by history prevents him from using such language as Nielsen's[204].

Shalabī describes Jainism as an atheistic religion in Mahāvīra's time, which was then

influnced by the Hindu context to accept the Hindu Gods and now the 24 *tīrthaṅkaras* as

Gods too. But Shalabī fails to mention that these Gods do not affect the core Jain belief

which rejects the existence of a reality other than the world in which we live[205]. After the

biographical description, Shalabī describes the principal Jain beliefs: Jainism and God;

Karma and metempsychosis; good and evil; salvation and the path to its attainment;

nakedness and suicide. The next section discusses the philosophy of Jainism from their

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202 IV, 117.

203 Nielsen, *op. cit.*, 364.

204 This example may seem to contradict an earlier statement in which I claimed that Shalabī exercized a lack of empathy regarding the Hindu worship of the sacred cow. There is no such contradiction though: both examples show how the resulting description is influenced by certain sensitivities emerging out of an author's own religio-cultural framework. Moreover, this last example with Nielsen is also a proof that Westerners are not exempt from such value-full judgements.

205 Nielsen, *op. cit.*, 364.

holy books. It is summarized in the three jewels: right belief, right knowledge and right creation(i.e.: rightly shaped by Jain ethics). There is also the basic principles for spiritual purity and the degrees of knowledge in Jain philosophy. Shalabī then closes his analysis of Jainism with a glance at its history.

Although the basic precepts of Jainism are well covered, Shalabī makes a distinction between philosophy and religion. He distinguishes in his chapter divisions between Jain beliefs and Jain philosophy. In the section on Holy books, again the idea of distortion comes up, and lack of unanimity in recognizing the Holy Books[206]. Moreover, Shalabī does not give the right dates nor does he explain properly (even much later in a different context p.130), the later separation between the two historical branches in Jainism: the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras [207]. Shalabī goes on with the issues of women and liberation, as well as the foetal origin of Mahāvīra (its being from Brah ṇa). In the section on Jain philosophy, Shalabī describes the five degrees of knowledge so central to the Jain religious quest. Shalabī is far from clear about them. Thus Shalabī's presentation of Jainism, the first of its kind in Arabic probably, lacks accuracy and reflects the same concerns as we see emerging out of his description of Hinduism.

Ahmad Shalabī offers to the Arabic speaking reader what is probably the longest introduction to Buddhism (54 pages) in Arabic[208]. He divides the material into 10 parts: historical background, biography of the Buddha, his teachings (natural laws and our role in them; metempsychosis; the fire of passion and how to extinguish it), nirvana and God in Buddhist philosophy; Buddhist doctrines; historical glance; holy books. Although the

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[206]   IV. 125.
[207]   Nielsen, op. cit., 365.
[208]   As mentioned previously, the main reason why Shalabī offers such a long introduction is because Buddhism is becoming a source of threat to Islam, due to its missionary outlook (preface: I, 20). He also makes his claim quite clear in his biographical account of Buddha, and how Buddhism became a missionary religion (IV, 152-154).

sequence differs from that found in his description of Hinduism, the same elements come back, as much linked to Shalabī's Islamic hermeneutics as before. In what remains probably the most difficult for Shalabī, the section on Nirvana, Shalabī distinguishes well between the liberation (*inṭilāq*) of Hinduism, the salvation (*najāt*) of Jainism and the nirvana of Buddhism. However, it is clear that the most important aspect to describe and explain is the missionary nature of Buddhism. Thus we find towards the end a five page section which is entitled: The new generation: between Buddhism, Nihilism and Christianity. Shalabī repeats once more his now familiar *leitmotiv* with his conclusion that there is but one alternative for the new generation: that is, to convert to Islam.

This overview of Shalabī's descriptions of religions allow us to extract the main structural elements of his hermeneutics. The first and underlying element is Islamic faith. It influences Shalabī's reading of the signs, symbols and structures of the religions he describes. In particular, the *Qurʾān* occupies a primary place both in terms of its perceived nature as scientific corroboration of historical reality and in terms of Shalabī's subconscious projection of the *Qurʾān* onto what a religion ought to be constituted of, that is, for a religion to be true it must have one holy text revealed by God and not affected by human distortions. The second element is the place of reason in the process of reaching what Shalabī considers as reality about the various religions. The answer to Shalabī's interpretation of science and the role of reason can be found in the difference between the meaning of the word *ʿilm* in the Islamic tradition, which has meant for centuries 'knowledge' and only recently 'science' and the meaning of 'science' in the West as 'systematic classification of knowledge through logical reasoning', a definition which carries a much more specific meaning than 'knowledge'. A third element is the meaning of the word history. For Shalabī, history is an outcome of God's intervention in the world. It is not interpreted as a systematic sequence of events which can be measured back to the beginnings of humanity's invention of writing. The *Qurʾānic* revelation here too plays an

important formative role in Shalabī's interpretation of history. A fourth element is the influence political events have played in Shalabī choice of method and language. The polemics to which he resorts in order to vindicate his own sense of reality, comes from an ideological interpretation of Islam, not an uncommon phenomenon in the last forty years in Egypt. Finally, a last important element in Shalabī's hermeneutics remains his appropriation of new contemporary knowledge into the traditional Islamic worldview. For example, he continues on the path of the school of Muslim heresiography which has attempted to typologized the whole of known human beliefs into one single Islamic system throughout a good part of Islamic civilization. The difference is simply one of scale, the contemporary reality now extending to include all peoples of the world. Our analysis of Shalabī's hermeneutics in his four volume series on comparative religions has hopefully revealed the underlying intentions and structures utilized to write the first conscious attempt by a contemporary Muslim to provide the general Arabic readership with a series of books which seek to interprete all the main religions on earth.

## 5.4 ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The previous three sections examined the descriptions which our three authors have made of separate religions. But such a historical approach to describe each religion separately is not the only way to examine the phenomena of religion. In *Religions-wissenschaft*, a scholar may use several other approaches, such as sociological, philological, anthropological, phenomenological, structuralist, philosophical, comparative, *etc.* Did our three authors resort to such approaches as developed in the West? and if so to what extent? An examination of these questions is vital to complete our assessment of how Abū Zahrah, Dirāz and Shalabī understood the study of religion and to what extent they made use of the wider variety of approaches nowadays available within *Religionswissenschaft.*

Abū Zahrah did not go beyond the use of a historical presentation of seven different religions. It should not be surprising as he was hardly exposed to Western trends in the study of religion. On the contrary, Shalabī and Dirāz were both influenced to different degrees by these Western trends. Shalabī not only made use of the comparative method a lot throughout his series, as we have pointed out earlier, but he even conceived the nature of the study of religion as being comparative. As for Dirāz, the whole of his book DIN reflects an attempt to depart from the traditional historical approach to describe separate religions. Let us examine Shalabī first, and then Dirāz.

Shalabī devotes two sections to comparative religions. The first consists of twelve pages in his introduction to "Judaism"[209]. The second one crowns his four book series on

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[209]    I, 24-36.

comparative religions, as it ends the final volume[210]. It is a 16 page section entitled: "The way of inquiry in comparative religions". In it, Shalabī does not only describe his two ways of inquiry in comparative religions, but gives an example of both. The first possible way is to take a theme and study it through the different religions, such as God, prophethood, holy books, etc. This approach was used by people like Max Müller, writes Shalabī[211]. The second approach is to write a series of books about each religious traditions, with some comments comparing aspects of the described religion with another tradition. This method is obviously the one which Shalabī has used for his own series[212]. But in an attempt to be thorough, Shalabī still writes this small section on comparative religions in which he compares the theme of God in the religions he studied. The aim and the results do not differ from the rest of his polemical series. His hermeneutics thus does not differ, whether he uses the first approach or the second. What is more interesting is that both imply the comparative method which reflects very much the English preoccupations in the study of religion during the forties and fifties, when Shalabī studied in England.

Dirāz's conceptualization of the study of religion, although certainly influenced in part by the French school "*Histoire des Religions*", in fact reacts against its more positivists tendency. Nevertheless, Dirāz's approaches still reflect trends more common in France and continental Europe than in England among scientists of religion in the nineteen forties. However, Dirāz's major epistemological commitment follows the subjectivism inherent to his Islamic faith commitment. Thus he naturally reacts against the objectivist schools such

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[210]    IV, 210-226. This same section is also repeated at the end of his second volume on Christianity: II, 280-297.    He probably repeated this section in volume II in particular because this volume was bound to be bought separately from the whole series by many Christians.    It was thus important to make sure that Christians would read the culmination of his argument for the importance of comparative religions.

[211]    IV, 210. It is natural that Shalabī would give such an example since Shalabī studied comparative religions in England where Müller had had such an impact on the creation of chairs in *Religionswissenschaft*.    It is also normal that Shalabī would have used the term 'comparative religion' to refer to the study of religion since this was the prefered term in England in his student days.    Eric Sharpe, <u>Comparative Religion: A History</u>, *op. cit.*, xiii.

[212]    IV, 211.

as positivism and materialism[213]. This is clear in his second, third and fourth essays of his book DIN in which Dirāz describes the broad relations between religion on the one hand and ethics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology, *etc.* on the other. Although these essays represent a mixture of approaches, they reflect important factors which enlighten Dirāz's hermeneutics on the study of religion.

In the second essay, Dirāz expounds on the relation between religion and the various kinds of culture and education. He divides his analysis into three sections: religion and ethics, religion and philosophy and religion and other sciences. Although there is a strong relationship of fraternity or fatherhood between religion, philosophy and ethics, Dirāz considers that there is a definite hierarchy in the value of sciences. From the sciences dealing with material things to those dealing with the immaterial, until the science of religion which deals with the highest of all ideals, the meaning of the beginning and end of life. All inferior sciences benefit directly to the sciences which are above them, but the science of religion is at the top since in does not directly feed in any other science: it is not useful to other sciences as such. Indeed, "religion will never be able to dispense from sciences,"[214] writes Diraz unambiguously. In fact, sciences help human beings to dissipate ignorance, a process which enlighten the individual and thus prepare his or her spirit to religion. If historically there has been a conflict between religion and science, it is precisely when religion and science have assumed utilitarian ends, and thus entering into competition with one another. However, there should never be any contradiction since there is no overlap in their respective objects of analysis[215]. Dirāz then moves to the more ethical realm in stating that taxing others or other fields of lying simply because it appears either to be in contradiction with one's findings or irrelevent to them reflects only ignorance. "And this is

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213     Henry Le Roy Finch, "Epistemology," Encyclopedia of Religion, Ed. M. Eliade, (New York: MacMillan, 1986), Vol. 5, 133-135.
214     DIN, 75.
215     DIN, 76.

the proper situation during which the knowledge of humanity may advance: for if it was necessary that every scientist celebrates a research on every questions in itself, then the sciences would advance at one pace" [216]. To strengthen his argument, Dirāz asks whether the knowlege and benefits gained from the spliting of the atom is not agreed upon by all despite the fact that only very few scientists actually investigated the matter? So what then, he continues, prevents us from believing in the spiritual wonders which were brought by prophets?[217] Thus Dirāz not only sees no contradiction between the two realms, but promotes the inquiry in both areas as a necessary human endeavour which will bring us closer to God.

The third essay deals with attitude of religiosity and the range of its firmness in creation. This chapter attempts to answer certain key questions such as: when did the idea of religiosity appear on earth? What is its destiny in the face of ideological developments in science? What is its psychological function? What is its sociological function? Dirāz concludes in his analysis that there is no more solid link then the religious one, which is above the links of race, language or geographical proximity. And he goes even further in drawing a very concrete exemple of what this should mean for a nation, Egypt being certainly the primary case implied: "Often we see countries which are based upon a foundation of shared conciliation in a homeland between the different sects which are obliged to seek help from all these religions' basis for cooperation for the good and to help each other pushing off enemies and invasions. Therefore it is truly said that the nationalism which does not rely upon the reason of creation and religion then it is a shaky protection which is about to collapse"[218]. Dirāz then concludes: "In short, religions in communities

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216    DIN,  77.
217    *Ibid.*
218    DIN,  105.

take the place of the heart in the body, and as for those who study religions it is as if they are recording the life of people and the times of civilizations"[219].

In his final overview of the book, Diraz stresses the importance of trying to find the common grounds between different doctrines[220]. For this end, he recommends that we benefit from all positive points of view, rather than from the negative ones. Thus our differences will induce cooperation rather than discorde. For Diraz, the intuitive knowledge in religion is much stronger than the external factors[221]. Nevertheless, there are a number of ways to reach God, and the diversity should not be reduced to one. He concludes that there are two broad characteristics. "Firstly, divine elements are manifested in everything. Secondly, every type of people has its own way of behavior, rather than another, in the seeking of guidance". So without mentioning at all the very sensitive issue of *ijtihād*, or personal struggle [to interprete, in this case], he argues that the *Qur'ān* is open to much interpretation[222].

And in his last paragraph, Diraz closes by saying that the different ways to reach God are all mentioned in the *Qur'ān*. Thus it is clear that Diraz never leaves his deep convictions, although he is able to go farther than our two other authors in showing how one can and must integrate scientific knowlege from the West into one's own religious understanding[223].

The position of Islam regarding other religions and its relation to it. This is the title of Diraz's last public presentation which he delivered in Lahore, Pakistan at the International

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219    *Ibid.*
220    DIN,    173.
221    *Ibid.*
222    DIN,    175-176.
223    DIN,    185.

Islamic Colloquium in January 1958. Although this ten page addition does not belong to the book per se but since the publishers have decided to included it in a later edition, the content of this article can not be overlooked. The readers of the later edition will automatically associate the article with the book, not distinguishing the circumstances and content of both. Yet the book and this article vary considerably in style, content and purpose. It is of much interest to make a comparison now, as it will shed considerable light on another perspective emerging out of Diraz himself a decade after the publication of Din. But let us first describe the contents of this presentation.

"If we take the word Islam", begins Diraz,"we find that it does not induce a scope for this question about the relation between Islam and the remaining divine religions"[224]. "For Islam in the qur'anic language in not a name for a special religion but a name for the common religion which all the prophets aimed at and with which all the followers of the prophets were associated"[225]. After quoting eight qur'anic passages to support his claim, Diraz defines this common religion, the religion of all prophets, as the belief in the unicity of God, Lord of the universe, and a sincere submission to it without associating to it anything. There is thus no need to ask ourselves what is the link between this Islam and other revealed religions, since it is the one and same thing. However, there is a popular understanding of Islam which constricts its meaning to only that which Muhammad brought of specific laws and teachings. So if we take this new popular understanding of Islam, the question then becomes: what is the relation between Islam (Muhammadīyah) on the one hand and Judaism (mūsawīyah) and Christianity (masīhīyah) on the other?[226] Diraz answers in two steps.

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[224]    DIN, 183.
[225]    *Ibid.*
[226]    DIN, 184.

In the first step, Dirāz investigates the relation between Islam and the two other faiths in terms of their original form. Second, he compares Islam with the two other faiths in their later developed appearances. Regarding the first, the *Qur'an* comes to approve of and confirm the previous revelations. In this, there is two stages reflected by the two types of laws: the eternal laws, such as the nine commandments and the laws fixed in time, thus possibly abrogated at the appropriate time by another revelation. These two types correspond to two necessities for the happiness of the human society: the element of continuity which links the human present with the past and the element of creation and renewal which prepares the present for development and progress towards a better and more perfect future[227]. He then elaborates on his argument giving only Qur'anic verses to support his claims.

In his second step, Dirāz investigates the relation between the *Qur'ān* and the revealed religions as they presently exist. The main verse from which Dirāz derives his two part analysis is *sūrah māʾidah*, verse 48, which reads: "And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it." For Diraz, the watcher over is the Qur'an, as final revelation. The watcher over function is one step beyond simply confirming what had come before. Indeed, it is to watch over all the accretions which slowly altered with time the initial pure message of monotheism, the Islam revealed by God through all his prophets. "In short, the relation of Islam with revealed religions in their initial form is a relation of confirmation and complete corroboration. As for its relation with revealed religions in their visible forms, it is a relation of confirmation for what remains of original parts and correction of what overtook it of innovation and strange accretions"[228]. But Dirāz goes even so far as saying that: "even for pagan religions, we see that the *Qurʾān* allows it and makes it clear, so that the elements of

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227    DIN,    186.
228    DIN,    189.

good, justice, right conduct are retained and those elements of falsehood, evil and innovation are removed"[229].

If this is the relation of Islam with other religions from a theoretical point of view, Dirāz adds also about the relation of Islam with other faiths from a practical point of view. He first asks whether the attitude of apathy is better than that of fighting and killing to enforce one's own vision? Islam is a middle way between these two extremes. There is a responsibility in being active in the calling people to God, (da⁶wah), yet there is no imposition of any kind. If the Qur'ān is so generous in its wise counsels about even the furthest away from monotheism as idolatrous religions, then how much more generous it is for people of the revealed religions. Indeed, it is not sufficient for Islam to provide freedom of worship and to protect that right for non-muslims, but it does so to the same extent as that provided to Muslims. In fact, "Islam never stopped one moment from extending its hand to touch the followers of all denominations and sects in the path of cooperation for building justice [...]"[230]. And Dirāz ends writing: "And this is the basis of world cooperation for peace which the prophet of Islam and the prophet of peace has proclaimed"[231]. Thus even if his question does relate to the reality of how Islam is often perceived, versus how the West is often perceived, Dirāz does not really talk of the reality of frictions: he remains on a theoretical level about how the message of the Qur'ān is really a middle way which, if followed, would ensure peace.

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[229]    *Ibid.*
[230]    DIN,   192.
[231]    *Ibid.*

## 6. CONCLUSION

This conclusion will highlight the historicality of consciousness[1] which has been marked by the fusion between the interpreter, i.e. myself, and our three authors' seven books. Through this fusion the two traditions of *Religionswissenschaft* and of the Islamic study of religion have met. The above analysis of how three contemporary Muslims have interpreted the study of religions and of how they have used the scientific study of religion represents one possible angle to evaluate some of the issues arising out of the unique relationship between these two traditions. Before we turn to these issues however, it is necessary to sum up the following points: first, the Islamic hermeneutical perspective out of which our three authors have interpreted the study of religion; second, the scientific hermeneutics which have constituted the standard of comparison. Finally, a set of introspective questions on the possibility for an integrated epistemology for the Islamic study of religion and *Religionswissenschaft* on the basis of this thesis' results will, we hope, enable us to assess the historicality of consciousness which has nurtured this thesis.

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[1] The 'historicality of consciousness' is a phrase meaning the fusion between the interpreter and his/her text, or action, symbol, etc. under interpretation. William Schweiker, "Beyond imitation: mimetic praxis in Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida," The Journal of Religion, 68:1(1988), 26.

## 6.1 ISLAMIC HERMENEUTICS

The mode of interpretation which comes out of the seven books written by Abū Zahrah, Dirāz and Shalabī is distinctively Islamic, despite the wide differences in its application. It constitutes first and foremost an Islamic hermeneutics because the principal components of an epistemology based on Islamic faith are present. First, there is faith in the Qurʿān as God's ultimate revelation for all of humanity. Second, there is faith in the Islamic community, the ʾummah, as the community par excellence which is faithful to God's will and through which have come down through the centuries, the perfect interpretation of the Qurʿān and Muḥammad's sunnah, tradition. Third, there is faith in the mission to promote Islam to the whole world. And finally, there is faith in the superiority of God's guiding revelation to the work of human reason alone.

The other components in the underlying structures common among our three authors are not specifically Islamic, although they reveal varying degrees of subordination to the Islamic factors. Firstly, there is the use of reason as a scientific method in and of itself. This usage reflects the very close association between ʿaql, reason, and ʿilm, knowledge, as indicated in the Arabic of the Qurʾān[2]. The difference with the West, in which we also find this close association reason-knowledge, is that our three authors show no attitude of self-reflexion on the nature of their own reasoning process or on how to study a data field, i.e. on methodology[3]. Secondly, there is the use of a specific holy text, in this case the Qurʾān, as a valid source of scientific knowledge which need not go through

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[2]    "The concepts of reason and science (ʿilm) used in the Qurʾān, for example, are not the same as those developed later by the falāsifah, according to the Platonic and the Aristotelian schools. However, the concepts elaborated in Qurʾānic discourse are still used more or less accurately today because the episteme introduced by the Qurʾān has not been intellectually reconsidered". Mohammed Arkoun, Rethinking Islam Today, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1987), 5.

[3]    Richard Martin Ed., Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985), 10.

the same critical process as any other text since the Islamic tradition validates its objective truth[4]. Thirdly, we are faced, as Arkoun so aptly noted, with "a collection of facts [which] is related to a chronology representing time as *stable*, without a dynamic movement of change and progress. No link is established between time as a historical dynamic process (historicity) and the elements of knowledge collected by the historiography"[5]. And finally, the contemporary Islamic categories, beliefs, and procedures of reasoning we have found in our three authors represent modes of perceiving reality which were first developed during the scholastic period (7th to 8th centuries H.), a time when the pluralism of the classical period was disappearing in favor of the only two major traditions of interpretation in the Islamic world, that is: *sunnī* and *shīʿī*.

The final results of this analysis of three contemporary Muslim authors prove that despite their distinctive approaches and degrees of openness to the scientific tools of reasoning developed in the West, the Islamic faith commitment pervades all aspects of their writings, from the style of language (although Dirāz's remains very close to scientific sobriety), to the underlying subconscious structures through which selection of 'facts', interpretation of meanings, and description of religions other than Islam are carried out. Even the use of source references done in a Western scientific style in the case of Shalabī and Dirāz is no guarantee of scientific standards comparable to ours. The Egyptian Islamic *imaginaire* in which all three of our authors have grown up must have permeated their respective outlooks on life in such a way, and at such an early age, that scientifc epistemology had no sway upon them, even ultimately Dirāz. The several differences noted among them in their intentions, methods and descriptions reflect more their unique

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4    Even Dirāz participated in this interpretation or belief, as confirmed in his additional essay which was added to his book DIN, presented at the International Islamic Colloquium in Lahore in 1958. See section 5.4, page 157 and section 2.3, page 23 note 5. The closing of the *mushaf* debate by the fourth century H. indicates that ever since then, the contents of the *Qurʾān* have been considered as historical facts going back directly to Muhammad.

5    M. Arkoun, *op. cit.*, 11-12.

personalities and their respective reactions to the 'other', be it the different religions they described or Western science, than truly different epistemological and ontological approaches to Islam and world reality. Thus, despite the many external differences in how our three authors have interpreted the study of religion, the same implicit Islamic postulates underlie Abū Zahrah's, Dirāz's and Shalabī's respective hermeneutics. This fact explains why ultimately the meaning of science and of the various religions is shaped by the Islamic *sunnī* fabric present in twentieth century Egypt.

## 6.2 SCIENTIFIC HERMENEUTICS

Scientific hermeneutics refers to the elements of interpretation integral to science in general, whatever the particular science in question. In *Religionswissenschaft*, these elements of interpretation take their origins in the Enlightenment, as we have seen in the introduction. They include a radical departure from the world-view of the European Middle-Ages in which an external object, in this case the Judeo-Christian God, governs reality through an objectified body of texts and rituals which participate directly in His essence. Scientific hermeneutics is a movement into a worldview in which the center revolves around the individual thinking human being. Insofar as the individual thinks, there is automatically a corresponding objectification linked to language. The object created in the mind on the basis of an association with the surrounding context becomes true. The ongoing process of classifying these objects promotes a common worldview, that of science, which has provided ultimate meaning to many human beings.

We have now reached another radical departure, as a shift from objective science to subjective science is taking place through advances in hermeneutical philosophy[6]. Historicity and language become the new recognized factors through which human interpretation and understanding take place. The self becomes self-reflective, included in all projects of interpretation to give meaning to a text, an action, a symbol, life. Efforts are made to make the implicit explicit, efforts non-existent among our three Muslim Egyptians[7].

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[6]    For some of the latest developments in hermeneutical philosophy, see John D. Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[7]    Admittedly, it would be unfair to expect Dirāz and Abū Zahrah to have possibly been influenced by such hermeneutical trends, since they really only became influential from the nineteen sixties onwards. It was difficult even for Shalabī to have been touched since he studied in England in the forties.

The difference between the new emerging rationality and all inherited rationalities-including the Islamic reason- is that the implicit postulates are made explicit and used not as undemonstrated certitudes revealed by God, or formed by a transcendental intellect, but as modest, heuristic trends for research.[8]

The important debate on the place, meaning, and relationship of phenomenology and history within *Religionswissenschaft* over the last three decades, represents such a modest, heuristic trend for research in our own field. Religionists have tried to remedy the inadequacies of the old historico-positivist, textual-philological methods inherited from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the fact that the use of these approaches still is prominent within Islamic Studies might explain the relatively recent upsurge by Muslim scholars against the 'Orientalism' approach prevalent in much of Islamic Studies[9]. While Islamic Studies is integrating the phenomenological method in particular, an imperative dictated mainly by the growing number of committed Muslims in this academic field, it is possible to discern a movement within *Religionswissenschaft* which tries to integrate the developments in hermeneutical philosophy which are themselves closely linked to linguistics and semiotics. Indeed, the endless history-phenomenology dialectic is being recognized now as a natural tension which needs no winner. The vital link between the two is language, as it is the necessary medium for any interpretative process which will allow understanding and meaning to flow[10]. These are some of the more recent developments which reveal major elements of scientific hermeneutics today. Yet they do not solve the fundamental epistemological tension at the basis of our initial problem in this thesis: fideistic subjectivism versus scientific objectivism[11].

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[8] M. Arkoun, *op. cit.*, 8.

[9] Donald P. Little, "Three Arab Critiques of Orientalism," The Muslim World, 69:2(1979), 110-131.

[10] It seems that a spiral brings us back to the issue of language, a topic central to Max Müller's own interpretation of the religious phenomena.

[11] This opposition is noted by Richard C. Martin, *op. cit.*, 2.

## 6.3 TOWARD AN INTEGRATED EPISTEMOLOGY FOR

## *RELIGIONSWISSENSCHAFT* AND THE ISLAMIC STUDY OF RELIGION?

Gadamer sees the nature of the self and the nature of truth about the self as inseparable issues. He insists that the type of reality that the self is, directly determines the type of truth that is possible about it.[12]

The self need not be limited to the individual self. It may be extended to include larger realms of identity. In this case, my belonging, as a student, to the field of Islamic studies and to that of *Religionswissenschaft*, as well as my authors' belonging to the Islamic *ᵓummah*, community, both imply that these larger identities participate in our individual selves as human beings. Insofar as we objectify them, each larger level of identity becomes a self with its own identity. In these conditions, the larger object of identity takes on a life of its own, as a corporate self[13]. This explains why scholars always try to determine the nature of their own field of inquiry; they are looking for its identity and where they fit themselves in it.

But what are then the relations among the three larger selves or identities this thesis has mingled together? Obviously, these relations do not happen in a vacuum. They are bound to history and language, to historicity and signs. This means that interactions can happen only through individual human beings, as we may see from the figure below:

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[12]    Brice R. Wachterhauser, "Must we be what we say? Gadamer on truth in the human sciences," Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 221.

[13]    This is examplified perfectly in jurisprudence, when companies are given a human entity of their own, separate from any one of their members and yet equal in both linguistic parlance and legal status to a human being. The group takes an identity of its own; it possesses a self, which is called 'corporate identity'.

| Islam | Islamic Studies | *Religionswissenschaft* |
|---|---|---|

| selves of authors<br>under study | | my self<br>as an interpreter |

Each one of the five groupings above has a self of its own, an identity of their own. Thus, if we are to accept Gadamer's proposition, then we are to conclude that the type of reality of the above five selves directly determines the type of truth that is possible about each one of them. In other words, for example, the type of reality Islam is understood to be will determine what type of truth is possible about it. The way in which a Muslim will interpret Islam will not determine what Islam is, in and of itself, but rather it will determine what type of truth is possible about his/her version of Islam. The truth at issue is truth with a small 't' not with a capital 'T'[14]. The Muslim participates in his/her interpretation and understanding of Islam in a reflexive, even I shall contend, symbiotic manner. The same occurs for Islamicists and Historians of religions *vis-à-vis* their own field, whether consciously or not, for all are involved in the process of interpretation. The difference lies in how much self consciousness each person practices when writing. The greater the inclusion of one's own self in the process of understanding and interpretation, the greater we practice, in fact, the hermeneuticalapproach:

> For hermeneutical thinkers, our way of being in the world is that of understanding carried on through the interpretation of texts, symbols, actions, and events that disclose the human condition. Hermeneutics continues the concern for reflexive self-understanding, but it does so with attention to the linguistic and historical character of our existence.[15]

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[14] Some people might argue that 'Truth' with a capital 'T' exists unto itself. In this way, they can talk of Islam as an objectified Truth. In most cases, these people are blind to the nature of the symbiotic relationship between themselves and their objectified ideal. The 'Truth' exists apart from them, as a light providing guidance and is thus to be followed. Shalabī certainly belongs to this category. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those for whom the self merges (*fanāʾ*) into the ultimate truth, the relation between the subject 'self' and the object 'truth' ceasing as the self becomes extinguished. Such mystical, or in the case of Islam, ṣūfī approach has been put forward by many contemporary Muslims such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Idrīs Shah, Frithjof Schuon, etc. The hermeneutical approach allows us to make sense of both positions insofar as it relies on the structures of the relationship between subject and object, whatever their content might be.

[15] W. Schweiker, *op. cit.*, 22-23.

And regarding interpretation more specifically:

> Interpretation is, at first, an interactive conversation with a text. Within this activity there is a temporal fusion of horizons between interpreter and 'text' that marks the historicality of consciousness.[16]

So the present thesis has witnessed the temporal fusion of horizons between the interpreter (i.e. myself with my concerns for a reflexive self-understanding precipitated through the analysis of the 'other') and the 'text' (i.e. seven books written by our three Muslim authors).

But what exactly occurred during this fusion? What kind of historicality of consciousness characterizes the meeting of *Religionswissenschaft* and the Islamic study of religion? Is it possible that an integrated epistemology was at work between the interpreter and the text? Could the interpreter really merge into the Islamic hermeneutics of our authors for a thorough understanding of their respective understandings of the study of religion? Can we talk of a binding hermeneutical epistemology, without the full and direct human participation of the authors themselves? Or is there an unbridgeble gap between the twain? I am afraid that as long as the authors under study remain ultimately committed to their Islamic faith, and I to my own scientific rationality, no matter the method I may use, an integrated epistemology will never be possible. Unless we develop a common language, some lines of communication in the above chart will remain inactive, losing some of the resources of humanity's richness. But fortunately, new venues of interaction are already developing, especially with growing presence of Muslims living in the West. The future holds much hope for improvement in the relationship between the scientific study of religion and the Islamic study of religion.

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[16] *Ibid.*, 27.

## 7. <u>APPENDICES</u>

### 7.1 WORKS OF MUḤAMMAD ABŪ ZAHRAH

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؟ .    . محاضرات فى مقارنات الأديان. [القاهرة]: ؟. ط ٢، ١٩٤٩.

١٩٤٢. محاضرات فى النصرانية. القاهرة: مطبعة العلوم.

١٩٤٥. أبو حنيفة: حياة وعصره، أراؤه وفقهه. القاهرة: دار الفكر العربى.

١٩٤٧. ابن حنبل:    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    "    .

١٩٤٨. الشافعى:    "    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    .

١٩٥٠. مالك:    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    "    .

١٩٥٢. ابن تيمية:    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    .    .

١٩٥٤. ابن حزم:    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    "    .

١٩٥٩. الامام زيد :    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    "    .

١٩٦٠. الامام الصادق:    "    "    "    "    .    "    "    "    .    .

١٩٥٠. شرح قانون الوصية. القاهرة: مكتبة الانجلو المصرية.

١٩٥٥. محاضرات فى الميراث عند الجعفرية. القاهرة: معهد الدراسات العربية العالية، جامعة الدول العربية.

١٩٥٦. محاضرات فى أصول الفقه الجعفرى. القاهرة: معهد الدراسات العربية العالية، جامعة الدول العربية.

١٩٥٨. محاضرات فى عقد الزواج وأثاره. القاهرة: معهد الدراسات العربية العالية، جامعة الدول العربية.

١٩٥٨. الوحدة الاسلامية. القاهرة: المكتب الفنى للنشر.

١٩٥٩. محاضرات فى الوقف. القاهرة: معهر الدراسات العربية العالية، جامعة الدول العربية.

١٩٦١. شريعة القرآن من دلائل إعجازه. القاهرة: دار الثقافة العربية للطباعة.

١٩٦١. الفقه الاسلامى والقانون الرومانى. من مجموعة «دراسات فى الاسلام»، عدد ١١. القاهرة: وزارة الأوقاف.

١٩٦١. نظرية الحرب فى الاسلام. من مجموعة «دراسات فى الاسلام»، عدد ٥. القاهرة: وزارة الأوقاف.

١٩٦٧. موسوعة الفقه الاسلامى. القاهرة: جمعية الدرسات الاسلامية.

١٩٧٠. الميراث عند الجعفرية: مع ترجمة السيد الامام ابى عبد الله جعفر الصادق. بيروت: دار الرائد العربى.

١٩٧٢. خاتم النبيين. ٢ أجزاء. القاهرة: دار الفكر العربى.

١٩٧٢. الدعوة الى الاسلام: تأريخها فى عهد النبى والصحابة والطابئيين والعهود المتلاحقة وما يجب الآن. القاهرة: دار الفكر العربى.

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؟ . تاريخ الجدل.

؟ . تاريخ المذاهب الاسلامية. جزءان. القاهرة: دار الفكر العربى.

؟ . تنظيم الاسرة وتنظيم النسل.

؟ . تنظيم الاسلام للمجتمع. القاهرة: مكتبة الانجلو المصرية.

؟ . الجريمة والعقوبة فى الفقه الاسلامى. القاهرة: دار الفكر العربى.

؟ . الخطابة: أصولها، تاريخها فى أزهر عصورها عند العرب.

؟ . علم أصول الفقه.

؟ . فى المجتمع الاسلامى.

؟ . المعجزة الكبرى: القرآن الكريم.

؟ . الملكية ونظرية العقد.

؟ . الولاية على النفس.

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١٩٦٥. فى الدين والاخلاق والقومية. تقديم: السيد محمد البدوى. القاهرة: دار الكاتب العربى.

١٩٧٢. دراسات اسلامية فى العالقات الاجتماعية والدولية. كويت: دار القلم، ط ٢.

١٩٧٨. المختار من كنوز السنة: شرح اربعين حديثا. القاهرة: دار الانصار، ط ٢.

١٩٧٨. مدخل إلى القرآن الكريم: عرض تأريخي وتحليل مقارن. ترجمة محمد عبد العظيم على. مراجعة السيد محمد بدوى. كويت: دار القلم، ط ٢.

١٩٧٩. نخبة الازهار وروضة الافكار. قطر: مطبعة على نفقة.

١٩٧٩. من خلق القرآن. مع تحقيق خادم العلم عبد الله إبراهيم الانصاري.
قطر: مطبوعات إدارة الشؤون الدينية.

١٩٨٠. دستور الاخلاق فى القرآن. بيروت: دار البحوث العلمية، ط ٢.

؟ . الازهر الجامعة الديمة والحديثة.

؟ . تفسير بعض صور وأجزاء من القرآن الكريم.

؟ . الرباء فى نظر القانون الاسلامى.

؟ . الصوم.

؟ . كلمات فى مبادى الفلسفة الأخالق.

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٢. المسيحية.
٢. الاسلام.
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١٩٦٦. تعليم اللغة العربية. القاهرة : مكتبة النهضة المصرية.

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١. تأريخ المناهج الاسلامية .

٢. الفكر الاسلامى: منابعة وآثاره .

٢. السياسة فى الفكر الاسلامى مع المقارنة بالنظم السياسية المعاصرة .

٤. الاقتصاد فى الفكر الاسلامى مع المقارنة بالنظم الاقتصادية .

٥. التربية الاسلامية: نظمها - تأريخها - فلسفتها .

٦. المجتمع الاسلامى: أسس تكوينه - أسباب ضعفه - وسائل نهضته .

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٨. تأريخ التشريع الاسلامى وتأريخ النظم القضائية فى الاسلام .

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