

**WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH'S
CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's contribution to the field of religious studies, with special reference to his study of Islam. Smith's views as a historian of religion, as an Islamicist and as the pioneer of a new approach to the study of other men's faith are of great significance.

This thesis studies his work on Islam in the light of the development of his ideas with regard to the concept of religion and the approaches to studying it. The evolution of Smith's understanding of Islam is classified here into three phases. During the first phase, Smith's approach was socialistic; he was essentially concerned with the social role of religion, in this case Islam, in modern society. In the second phase of his work as an Islamicist, it was the concern to acquire a more adequate knowledge of Islam and to create a sympathetic understanding of the Muslim culture and religion.

The third phase was marked by the publication of his seminal work, The Meaning and End of Religion (1962). His work on Islam in this phase is in the nature of explorations into his own theories regarding the study of religion in general. During this phase, Smith devoted much attention to such concepts as "religion", "faith", and "cumulative tradition", as well as to a new approach in the comparative history of religion. This indicates that Smith in this phase was not only a specialist of Islam, but a historian of religion and a comparative religionist.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse est une étude de la contribution de Wilfred Cantwell Smith dans le domaine des études religieuses, avec mention spéciale de ses études sur l'Islam. Les vues de Smith, en tant qu'historien des religions, spécialiste de l'Islam, et pionnier d'une nouvelle approche des croyances humaines sont d'une grande importance.

Cette thèse analyse son oeuvre sur l'Islam, particulièrement en ce qui a trait au développement de ses idées à l'égard du concept religieux et de son étude. L'évolution de sa compréhension de l'Islam est présentée ici selon trois phases principales. En première phase, son approche était ouvertement socialiste et concernait essentiellement le rôle social de la religion, plus particulièrement l'Islam dans la société moderne. Dans la seconde phase de son oeuvre, sa préoccupation était d'acquérir une connaissance plus adéquate de l'Islam et de créer une compréhension "sympathique" de la culture et de la religion musulmanes.

La troisième période est marquée par la publication de son oeuvre majeure The Meaning and End of Religion (1962). Son oeuvre sur l'Islam dans cette phase est dans la nature même des explorations de ses propres théories concernant les études religieuses en général. Durant cette phase, Smith consacre beaucoup d'attention à des concepts comme celui de religion, de croyance, ou de tradition cumulative ainsi qu'à une nouvelle approche à l'histoire comparative des religions. Donc, durant cette période, Smith n'était pas seulement un spécialiste de l'Islam, mais également un historien des religions et un spécialiste de la religion comparée.

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I dedicate this work to the memory of my father. It was he who took me to school on my very first day.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an analysis of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's contribution as a historian of religion, an Islamicist, and as the pioneer of a new approach to the study and understanding of Islam. The thesis will also discuss, wherever necessary and to the limit that the scope of this study permits, his work on religion in general to serve as background to his study of Islam.

There is no need to write about the significance of such a well-known scholar as W.C. Smith who has been considered by many eminent scholars as the most important living historian of religion, a man whose thought has been very influential in contemporary religious studies. It may suffice to quote two views on him. John Hick writes:

Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his work on the concept of religion and of religions has been responsible, more than any other single individual, for the change which has taken place within a single generation in the way in which many of us perceive the religious life of mankind.¹

In the opinion of Charles J. Adams:

Smith has made one of the foremost contributions to the understanding of Islam in this generation, and his influence has

¹ John Hick, "Religious Pluralism". In Frank Whaling, ed. The World's Religious Traditions, Current Perspectives in Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1984, p. 174.

touched many others in both oriental and theological studies. His works that treat of trends in contemporary Islamic world rank as standard reference volumes, impressive both for their breadth of learning and the acuteness of their analysis.²

It is not the intention of this introduction to give a long and detailed survey of W.C. Smith's life and thought. But it seems necessary to mention briefly the religious background and academic milieu from which he comes, the two major factors which have had a significant bearing on his whole career and ideas as well as his interest in Islam.

Born in 1916 of missionary parents, Smith grew up in his parental home which was permeated with missionary interest and concern. The Presbyterian Church of Canada ministered to and enjoyed the fellowship of the family. Formative experiences were his journey with his mother to Egypt in 1933 and his trip to India in 1941.³

In his undergraduate years, Smith studied classical Semitic languages and Near Eastern History. During these years, he was active in the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and became the President of the Student

² Charles J. Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition". In Leonard Binder, ed. The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976, p. 40.

³ For Wilfred Cantwell Smith's biography see Willard G. Oxtoby, ed. Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. New York: Harper & Row, 1976, pp. ix-xiv. See also Jacques Waardenburg, "General Editor's Preface". In W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam. New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981, pp. v-vi.

Christian Movement in 1933. During the following four years Smith studied theology in Britain, while at the same time pursuing Arabic and Islamic studies with H.A.R. Gibb, the well-known Islamicist, at Cambridge University.

During his 1941 trip to India, Smith stayed mainly in the city of Lahore as a representative of the Canadian Overseas Missions Councils. There he also taught Indian and Islamic history from 1941 to 1945. During this period, he was ordained as a minister. It was also there that he published his Modern Islam in India (1943).⁴ Finishing his graduate studies at Princeton University and having spent another year in an extended tour of the Muslim world, Smith returned to Canada to accept the appointment as Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University in Montreal. Two years later, in 1951, he founded McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies, serving as its first director until 1964 when he took up the Directorship of Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions.

What was distinctive about Smith's programs, both at McGill and Harvard, was his concern to facilitate a dialogue between the Western students and staff and non-Western students and staff members as participants of the religion under study. At the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill, he set the rule that half the faculty members and half the student body should be Muslims in order to come up with

⁴ W.C. Smith, Modern Islam in India. Lahore, 1943. This book was later revised and published in London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1946. The Lahore-edition is no longer in use; only the London-edition is available.

mutually acceptable descriptive formulations regarding Islam. At Harvard also, Smith combined a rigorous academic program in comparative religion with a residential setting. Smith and most of the students from different cultural and religious backgrounds lived in the Center residence; thus they could share colloquia and discourse.

These measures were taken in accordance with his principle of verification whereby

responsible writing on the religious traditions should not only conform to high academic standards of historical and linguistic accuracy but should also be verified by or written by acknowledged scholars of the tradition concerned.⁵

It has been Smith's principle that "no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers."⁶

After nine years at Harvard, Smith resigned to accept his third major appointment at Dalhousie University in Halifax. The lighter administrative load allowed him more time for research and writing about the nature of religious faith.

From an early age, Smith lived and worked in a religiously pluralistic environment. This contributed greatly to the formulation of his concepts of the "faith of

⁵ F. Whaling, "Introductory Essay". In Op. cit., p. 7.

⁶ W.C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?". In Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa, ed. The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959, p. 42.

others", and "world theology". His residence among and communication with Muslims did affect his understanding of Islam, as he has himself acknowledged:

If I have been able at all to gain some valid insight into this faith, this has been due in some part to supplementing my reading with endless conversations with Muslims who generously and patiently have been willing to talk with me ... of Islam, of contemporary events, of life in general and in particular. The usefulness of this in clarifying awareness has been great...⁷

Smith has published extensively on Islam, inter-religious understanding, the history of religion, and the teaching of religion. In much of his writing, as a comparative religionist, Smith has attempted to reconcile being a faithful Christian with the academic or "objective" study of religion. With regard to the problem of theological presuppositions, he writes:

It is the *engagé* participant, involved in the sustained endeavour to understand his own tradition (in my case, the Christian), and the serious student, involved in a sustained endeavour to understand one or more traditions other than his own (in my case, primarily the Islamic), that find themselves increasingly forced by the data before them to modify the presuppositions on which their basic questions were originally framed.⁸

⁷ W.C. Smith, Islam in Modern History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. vii.

⁸ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion. New York: Macmillan, 1962, p. 13.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid shocking traditional religionists, he professes Christian allegiance:

I am Presbyterian, and will never shake off my delightful Calvinistic Puritanism, until the day I die; yet the community in which I participate is not the Presbyterian, but the Christian. I participate as a deliberate though modified Puritan in the Christian community and the Christian process.⁹

Despite the fact that Smith's works on Islam are both quantitatively and qualitatively considerable, no comprehensive study concentrating on Smith's understanding of Islam has been done so far.¹⁰ Therefore, the present study relies extensively on Smith's own writings on Islam.

⁹ W.C. Smith, "The Theology of Religions: Participation as a Possible Concept of a Theology of the Religious History of Mankind". A paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Theological Society, New York, 1969, p. 35.

¹⁰ There are two theses dealing with Smith's work on Islam. R.J. Jones, W.C. Smith and K. Cragg on Islam: Their Contrasting Implications for a Theology of Religion and a Theology of Mission. A Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto, 1988; Peter Ipema, The Islam Interpretations of Duncan B. Macdonald, Samuel M. Zwemer, A. Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred C. Smith: An Analytical Comparison and Evaluation. A Ph.D. dissertation submitted to The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1971. Nevertheless, the nature of these two theses are different from the present study. The first work examines two versions of mission by focusing on W.C. Smith's and K. Cragg's theological appreciation of Islam. The chapter dealing with Smith's interpretation of Islam covers only 38 pages of the entire study. The second work explores the interpretations of the four mentioned scholars on certain selected issues and focuses on the role of their interpretations in the dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

It is an examination of the primary sources in order to explore Smith's approach to Islam and to religion in general.

Smith expresses the position that Islam held in his three phase attempt as follows:

Six years after my Islam in Modern History [1957] was published, my seeing Islam as an inherently and characteristically human involvement (rather than as a "religion", unrelated to outsiders) had increasingly led me to see it as within the general pattern of humankind's religious and cultural life. The specific illuminated the general, and vice versa ... It was not fortuitous, accordingly, that the following year I left McGill and my specialization as an Islamicist, for Harvard, to work in the wider field of Comparative Religion. My interest in Islam did not cease; but I increasingly came to see it as one of the major ways of being human.¹¹

In order to better situate Smith's contribution to the study of Islam, it is indeed necessary to mention other approaches to the study of Islam. As Richard J. Jones writes, "Smith finds most Christian views of Islam held prior to his own generation to be deficient in that they placed Islam in categories unrelated to its own self-understanding."¹² Jones characterizes the views rejected by Smith as follow: (1) a Christian approach in which "Islam is presumed to derive, and to deviate, from Christianity."¹³ (2) Another common Christian view that Islam "is an orientation stemming from

¹¹ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p. 27.

¹² R.J. Jones, Op. cit., p. 46.

¹³ Ibid.

false prophecy."¹⁴ (3) The "reification of Islam"¹⁵, i.e., the understanding of it as a system of concepts and observances. The latter will be dealt with in more details later on in chapter three of this study.

Discussing a number of perspectives governing the approach to Islam, Charles J. Adams considers the following as the most important: (1) the normative or religious approaches; (2) the philological and historical approach; (3) the social scientific approach; (4) the phenomenological approach.¹⁶ Among the normative or religiously motivated approaches Adams distinguishes the following three: (a) the traditional missionary approach; (b) the Muslim apologetic approach; and (c) the irenic approach of some recent Western writers.¹⁷ He considers W.C. Smith as one of the leading representatives of the irenic approach to Islam which has developed after World War II in the West.¹⁸ The main characteristics of this new approach to Islam are all traceable in Smith's works. They may be summarized as follows:

- A greater appreciation of Islamic religiousness and the fostering of a more positive attitude to it;
- The researcher himself is religiously involved, animated in large part by religious and moral purposes in addition to intellectual ones;

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ C.J. Adams, Op. cit., pp. 34-48.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

- A more profound and acute grasp of what Islam represents to Muslims themselves and the search for a truly positive evaluation of Islamic piety;
- An effort to overcome the generally prejudiced, antagonistic, and condescending attitudes of Westerners, particularly Western Christians, toward the Islamic tradition;
- At the same time it has sought "dialogue" with Muslims in the hope of building bridges of mutual sympathy between religious traditions and nations.¹⁹

Finally Smith's contribution to a better understanding of Islam may also be seen with reference to Edward W. Said's controversial Orientalism (1979),²⁰ wherein almost all Western studies of Islam are bitterly condemned as prejudiced and hostile. Smith's approach has been considered by some scholars as an alternative to what Said criticizes, for it has, to a valuable degree, transcended the prevailing Western outlook on Islam and has become one of the pioneers of a "New Orientalism".²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

²⁰ Edward W. Said, Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. The book provoked a great deal of comment, both positive and negative, and it has been widely quoted by various authors. See for instance the following book reviews: C.E. Butterworth, American Political Science Review 74, 1980, pp. 174-176; D. Duncanson, Asian Affairs 11, 1980, pp. 200-201; P. Gran, Journal of the American Oriental Society 100, 1980, pp. 328-331; P. Kemp, Arabica 27, 1980, p. 154-79; M. Kerr, International Journal of Middle East Studies 12, 1980, pp. 544-7; B. Lebling, Journal of Palestine Studies 9/2, 1980, pp. 118-9; B.D.H. Miller, Oriental Art 28/3, 1982, p. 284; J.S.F. Parker, Gazelle Review of Literature of the Middle East 7, 1980, pp. 4-16; B. Turnur, Iranian Studies 14, 1981, pp. 107-12; B. Winder, The Middle East Journal 35, 1981, pp. 615-19.

²¹ See for instance Antonio R. Gualtieri, "Hermeneutics of the Old and New Orientalism". In E.L. Sullivan & J.B.

This study has three chapters each one dealing with one phase of Smith's understanding of Islam. Chapter one examines Smith's presentation of Islam and its role in a modern society. This chapter is based mainly on his first book on Islam entitled Modern Islam in India (1946). He supplemented his reading by contact and interviews with persons closely associated with various parties and movements involved in his study. His approach in this phase is basically Marxist for he was then deeply preoccupied by socialist issues and goals.

The second chapter is a delineation of Smith's effort in the second phase as an Islamicist to provide a more adequate knowledge of Islam and to create a sympathetic understanding of the Muslim culture and religion. At this stage, Smith focuses not on a specific geographical area, but on common factors and problems related to Muslim identity across various cultural areas. The major themes of his concern in this respect include the Muslim community in history, the fundamental problems of Modern muslim nations, and the means that they have employed to reconstruct their society. Among other works by Smith, his Islam in Modern History (1957) will be extensively used as exemplifying his attitude at this stage.

In the third phase Smith became increasingly interested in the study of religion in general. The content of chapter three relies on the fact that Smith in this phase is not

Ismael, eds. The Contemporary Study of the Arab World, Manitoba: The University of Alberta Press, 1991, pp. 55-59. See also J. Waardenburg, "Mustashrikūn". In The Encyclopedia of Islam, new ed. Vol. 7, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993, pp. 735-753.

only a specialist of Islam, but also a historian of religion and a comparative religionist. His works on Islam in this phase, later published in the volume On Understanding Islam (1981), are examined in this chapter in the light of his theory and suggestions with regard to the study of religion, and his analysis of concepts such as "religion", "faith", and "cumulative tradition", all set out in his seminal work The Meaning and End of Religion (1962).

With regard to the problem of transliteration, we have followed the convention of transliteration adopted by the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. Whenever different from the latter, the transliterations used in quotations are those used by the authors themselves.

CHAPTER I

A SOCIALIST INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM

In the early years of his career, both as a Christian missionary and as a young scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith was in close contact with Muslim society in India. The result of his close observation and study appeared in the form of his first book Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis (1946), and a number of articles. Our analysis, however, is basically centered on Modern Islam in India. The book, as Smith himself maintains, is "the study of a people"¹ going through the transformation from a traditional to a modern society. It is a study of the social and political development of the Muslim population of India under the impact of modernization. The main question which the book attempts to answer is: What role did the religion of Islam play in this development?

This chapter focuses on certain major questions: for example, how did Smith, as a Christian missionary with an academic interest, perceive Islam in India; and what were his expectations of religion in general and of Islam in particular? We will also deal with Smith's views on the Prophet Muḥammad and on the Shī'ite school of thought.

Modern Islam in India consists of two parts which deal with ideological issues and politics respectively.

¹ W.C. Smith, Modern Islam in India, p. 8.

To begin with, the study is aimed at being a "contribution to the sociology of religion"². As far as the method and the assumptions are concerned, the author claims to follow the "scientific method" and informs the reader that the book is "definitely written from a point of view,"³ the point of view of "a socialist with pronounced ethical convictions."⁴ The basic manifestation of this point of view is that Smith's treatment of Islam in India is based on economic and class analysis. The main assumption throughout the book is that different phases of British imperialism in India produced a new middle class. At each phase, this new class developed its own form of Islam suitable to its social functions. This process of Islamic modernism underwent three phases⁵.

The first phase is the consequence of British industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century during which India became the market for the manufactured goods produced by the British Industrial Revolution. Since this economic change in India was accompanied by the infiltration of British liberal culture,

the first major development in Islamic modernism was the working out of a liberal Islam compatible with the nineteenth century West, similar to it in general outlook, and especially in harmony with its science, its business method, and its humanitarianism... repudiating from Islam all that

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-13.

prohibited or ran counter to western bourgeois principles⁶.

The second phase begins in the late nineteenth century when the new stage of British imperialism, namely finance capital, brought into being petty Indian industrialism which in its own turn caused the advancement of the Indian bourgeoisie. Contrasting with the previous phase this new Indian middle class was less dependent on the British bourgeoisie and its values. Consequently,

there was elaborated an Islam not only compatible with but considered to be the very source of Western liberalism,... This was accompanied by a burst of enthusiasm for the glory of Islamic culture in the past, and particularly the brilliant "Abbāsī age."

The men behind the last phase of Islamic modernism, which Smith identifies as the progressive phase that later turned out to be reactionary, belong to the middle class. They were frustrated with capitalism which was not expanding fast enough and could not provide them opportunities for economic advancement. They were looking forward to the future, appealing for the abolition of the status quo and for the construction of a new society closer to their ideals.

This movement has repudiated not only the West, as did the preceding one, but also Westernism itself; instead of claiming liberalism as its own, as Islamic, it supersedes liberalism with a new and creative vision. Its pride is no longer in the

⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

'Abbāsī culture of the Muslims, for that was too "imperialistic". Rather it has stressed the very early period of Islam (Khilāfat al-Rāshidah), the last ten years of the Prophet Muḥammad's lifetime and the first thirty years after his death.⁸

At this stage of Indian Islamic modernism W.C. Smith discusses Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān and his Aligarh movement.⁹ This latter movement is the representative of the bourgeois middle class, whose members are responsible for and are the initiators of the first phase of Islamic modernism, namely liberal Islam. The audience for this trend was "the incipient Muslim bourgeoisie, created by and developed under the bureaucratic and industrial imperialism of the British."¹⁰

The role of Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān as the leader of the movement was to make Islam compatible with modernity and to show its implications for the new life style:

Theologically, Sir Sayyid's task was to distinguish from the essence of Islam all those parts of the religion which were relevant to or compatible with only the pre-bourgeois society in which it had existed. His Essays on the Life of Muḥammad... was written to prove that Islam is a

⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹ For the development of modern Islamic trends in India See Aziz Ahmad, Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan (1857-1964). London: Oxford University Press, 1967; Marshal G.H. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, vol. 3: The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.

¹⁰ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 15.

respectable religion, judged by modern-western standards.¹¹

Being the product of his time Sir Sayyid, who "had himself absorbed the spirit of that Western culture, more specially its rationalism,"¹² proclaimed the criteria of Reason and Nature for judging the authority of tradition, the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic sacred law), and the Qur'ān. Among all these sources recognized as authoritative for the interpretation of Islam, he took only the last one "as determinative of Islam."¹³ Rejecting the social morality of early Islam embodied in the literature of its first centuries, "he began afresh with the Qur'ān and brought out its relevance to the new society of his own day."¹⁴

Although Smith maintains that the distinction between the first and the second phases of Islamic modernism "cannot be drawn sharply", he recognizes an existing difference.¹⁵ Here again the rise of the new movement which, unlike the first one, is in favour of the Islamic culture of the past finds an economic justification based on social class analysis. As a consequence of economic changes in Great Britain, the Indian "bourgeoisie [found] its own creative task: to build up on its own initiative a native

¹¹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

capitalism"¹⁶ which was soon ruthlessly suppressed and confined by British imperialism. As a consequence, Indian bourgeois society

reached in a generation or two the period of frustration which Western bourgeois society has reached only after a few centuries.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the men involved in this highly competitive and probably disappointing life turned to a religion with more substance than the Aligarh School offered. Sir Sayyid's Islam gave them permission to be bourgeois. They needed also a courage, confidence, and drive to be bourgeois; and, eventually, solace. These were things the new religion gave.¹⁷

The representative of this new Islam was Amīr `Alī. His "liberal Islam"¹⁸ dominated

especially within the central and lower middle classes. It is those people, of course, who need religion most - for whom religion has the greatest function to fulfill; and who, in all spheres of living, have moved less far from the old traditional life. The upper bourgeoisie ... are satisfied with Sir Sayyid's attenuated faith, or with none at all.¹⁹

While the role of liberal Islam was an accommodation to existing social change, Islam in the progressive phase, as Smith puts it, "must be refashioned to give dynamic

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Smith labels the Islam of this phase "liberal". See for instance Ibid., pp. 56-57.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

initiative and vision to man facing a life of opportunity."²⁰ Among the "few liberal Muslims [who] abandoned the static idea of religious authority and finality,"²¹ Muḥammad Iqbāl set himself the task of refashioning Islam. This new progressive phase of modern Islam in India, according to Smith, was in favor of a new culture of the future, and it underwent two stages: progressive and reactionary. Unlike the first two movements, Smith does not associate the rise of this progressive and later reactionary phase with any specific economic change and the rise of a new social class. Rather, he links the beginning of the movement to dynamic thinking among Indian Muslims, just as liberal thought in the West is linked to the idea of evolution and its application to religion.²² Following this liberal evolution and with the popularization of the idea of progress, came a further recognition:

that not only is human society and human life changing rapidly; but it is man himself who is effecting the changes ... and can control them [which] means that the old ideas of ethics are no longer ethical.²³

Accordingly, "much energy was devoted to proving Islam progressive."²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

²¹ Ibid., p. 99.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

As we have seen above, W.C. Smith's analysis of Islamic developments in India is based on his class-ideology. To criticize Smith in this respect would mean to critically evaluate the principles of class-ideology, which is beyond the limited scope of the present study. Nevertheless, we can point out that this view leaves little room for factors other than those of socio-economic status or class in the development of Islamic thought in modern India. For instance, Smith fails to provide an economic justification for what happened in the case of someone such as Iqbāl who, according to Smith, "was a bourgeois, and in some respects a contented one [and who] never really deserted his class."²⁵ Iqbāl broke with his predecessor Amīr 'Alī's liberal Islam and introduced a "radically new and basically different" Islam.²⁶ However, in order to explain how Iqbāl gainsaid his progressive ideology and became a reactionary, Smith appeals to the class content of Iqbāl's ideas.²⁷

As a concluding remark to this part, we may quote H.A.R. Gibb's evaluation of Smith's treatment of Islam at this stage of its development:

[In] Mr. Smith's treatment of modern Islamic movement in India ... the class content of religious ideology is constantly brought to light. Passing his facts through a fine sieve of doctrinal analysis, sharpened by the dogmatism of our younger socialist, it is not surprising that

²⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

he finds little good grain and a vast quantity of chaff.²⁸

Smith's perception of what religion in general and Islam in particular should be is manifested throughout the book in the form of his criticism of Islam as presented by each of the Islamic movements in India. For instance, when he criticizes the liberal form of Islam developed by Amīr `Alī and propagated by his bourgeois followers, he demands practical ethical convictions and ethical profundity. He writes:

The religious charge that one can lay against it, and against all this movement, is its ethical poverty: it makes no demands upon the Muslim. It is beautiful, but inspires no activity. The Islam here presented is altogether admirable. But the function of a true religion, even a liberal would admit, is not only to be admired.²⁹

As a sign of ethical poverty in liberal Islamic movements Smith points out that these people did their best to present an Islam which was admirable and compatible with liberal values, and "they succeeded moderately well in making out Islam to be liberalism, rationalism, tolerance, etc."³⁰ But all these exist only in quotations from the Qur'ān and the tradition or accounts of the Prophet's life, not in their practice. It seems that Smith has a specific meaning in mind when he speaks here about "ethical poverty": it means for him lack of active response from the side of

²⁸ H.A.R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam. New York: Octagon Books, 1972, p. 57.

²⁹ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 55.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

the followers of religion. This might be regarded as another indication or evidence of his looking at the issue from a specifically socialist point of view. Attacking liberal Islam for offering honor, satisfaction, comfort, and strength without asking any active response in return,³¹ and criticizing liberal Muslims for not devoting themselves to the commands of Islam and not applying them to their lives, Smith is, from his socialist perspective, close to Sunni orthodoxy³² "which at least takes its religion seriously and proposes to do something about it."³³

Smith's expectation about religion is that it should function as an ideology. He bitterly criticizes an Indian religious liberal who once stated that "Islam does not regard ritual and ceremonies as essentials of religion. In fact mere dogmatic doctrines have no significance for a true Muslim."³⁴ Smith takes these words as a repudiation of both ritual and dogma, and he asks: "If religion is neither belief nor practice, what is it?"³⁵ Smith likes the Islam which imposes specific duties on its believers, and such an Islam is far from the Islam of the liberals. He expects

³¹ Ibid., p. 70.

³² Smith believes that since there is in Arabic and indeed in any Islamic language no term quite corresponding to the Christian concept "orthodox" the nearest counterpart to *Sunni* would better be rendered "orthoprax". (W.C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p. 20.)

³³ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 70.

³⁴ Abdul Karim, Islam's contribution to Science and Civilisation. p. 11; quoted by W.C. Smith in Ibid., p. 83.

³⁵ W.C. Smith, op. cit., p. 83.

religion to promote responsibility, action, and change. Thus, he does not accept the Islam presented by Amīr `Alī's movement whose function, according to Smith, consists merely of distributing pride and contentment and of presenting Islam and Muḥammad as admirable, without inspiring dedication and change.³⁶ He condemns such a religion as being "but the feeling of satisfaction that accompanies the bourgeois life."³⁷

Two points are worth mentioning here. First, in the subsequent development of his thought Smith abandoned his earlier expectations of a religion. Thus the picture he presents later is not of a religion made up of dogma and practice, but of spirit. Second, if, as maintained by Smith, seeking spiritual satisfaction is a necessity of a bourgeois life, how can one explain the fact that throughout Islamic history there have been many trends represented by Muslims who were not from the bourgeois class and who yet sought from Islam nothing but spiritual satisfaction? Moreover, and long before the Industrial Revolution and its social and intellectual aftermaths, it has always been an Islamic teaching, particularly among Muslim mystics, that the real essence of religion is *īmān* (an inner relation to the transcendent), not ritual and dogmas. In other words, the religion of this people is not necessarily a liberal view of religion and has nothing to do with the rise of a bourgeois class.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

According to Smith:

Any religion will die out that does not have a positive function to fulfill, that is not something dynamic, summoning to action and leading men to some solution of their problems.³⁸

In the fast-moving world of today, Islam or any other religion, as a culture or a system of belief of yesterday, is in danger. If it wants to survive it "must adapt itself to the new world, must answer new questions and meet new needs."³⁹ He goes further and states that:

religion must be not only modern, to fit a situation which is different today from what it was in the twelfth, or the seventh century. Religion must be also dynamic, to fit a situation which is different one minute from what it will be the next. One can better say that religion today must apply not to a situation at all, but to a process.⁴⁰

With regard to Smith's argumentation in Modern Islam in India, words such as dynamism, action, problems or needs, mean social dynamism, social action, social problems and social needs. His emphasis on the social function of Islam and his condemnation of the passive Islam of the liberals because of its lack of social function, show that Smith is eager to confine Islam, at least a viable Islam, to the social aspect of it. A few years later, in his booklet

³⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

Pakistan as an Islamic State (1951)⁴¹ Smith moderated his position and his understanding. His expectation concerning Islam is then no longer confined to its social aspect, although the social order is still emphasized.

Islam is a religion; and like other religions, is transcendent, ineffable; no form can contain or exhaust it. Like other religions, however, it has been (partially) expressed in many forms - artistic, intellectual, mystic - and more than some others, social. In fact Islam is characterized among the religions partly by the particular emphasis which it has from the beginning given to the social order.⁴²

The place given by Smith to the social aspect of Islam leads to the conclusion that unlike Christianity, "the law is the dominant symbol of Islamic faith."⁴³ He elaborates this when he distinguishes two forms of Islam: "Islam as a developing historical phenomenon, a tangible community on one hand, as a dynamic system of ideals, a moral and religious ideology, on the other."⁴⁴ At this stage Smith's analysis and his emphasis on the social aspect of Islam might give rise to the following question: If it were not for the historical development of Islam accompanied by a dominant state, would Islam as a system of ideals give predominance to the social aspect? To state it differently, had it not been for the intimate relationship between Islam

⁴¹ W.C. Smith, Pakistan as an Islamic State. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1951.

⁴² Ibid., p. 22.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

and power, the social-political aspect of Islamic civilization would have remained unaccentuated in history.

1 - THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

In Modern Islam in India Smith discusses different pictures of the Prophet Muhammad present in various Islamic trends, each trend presenting him in accordance to its own ideals, values and functions. According to Smith, Muslims

will allow attacks on Allāh, but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, H.A.R. Gibb is right in criticizing Smith⁴⁶ for being too obsessed with his class ideology relating the Muslim's love of Muhammad to the individualism of capitalist society and saying that "liberal religion is more interested in person than it is in God."⁴⁷ Smith criticizes Muslim liberal writers for having depicted Muhammad as a perfect person and for having credited him with all virtues. Yet,

less attention is paid to Muhammad's intelligence, his acute and unscrupulous political sagacity, and especially his brilliantly aligning himself with and dynamically leading the deep sociological

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

⁴⁶ H.A.R. Gibb, Op. cit., p. 75.

⁴⁷ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 67.

forces which were already stirring in the society about him.⁴⁸

Here, Smith tries to humanize Muḥammad and his role. Such an understanding of Muḥammad and his divine mission is not acceptable to Muslims from the religious perspective. Smith's "socialist point of view" leads him to see Muḥammad as a social hero.⁴⁹

2 - THE SHĪ'AH

The very same trend is also in evidence when Smith views the first dissension in Islam (the emergence of Shī'ism) to have come about not over dogmas but over political issues. He thereby minimizes it to the issue of the succession of the Prophet. As far as socio-political developments in the Muslim community in India are concerned, Smith considers that there is no difference between the role of Sunnīs and Shī'īs. Therefore he does not give the Shī'ah a separate treatment in his book. By reducing the causes of major division in Islam merely to political discontent, Smith seems to be oversimplifying a problematic issue in Islamic history. The following is the summation of his position with regard to the Shī'ah:

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Smith's position in this respect is similar to Maxime Rodinson's in his book Mohammed. London: Penguin Books, 1961, and W. Montgomery Watt's in Muhammad: The Prophet and Statesman. London: Oxford University Press, 1961. For a contrast between the "religious" perspective and the "historical" perspective on the life of Prophet Muhammad see F.E. Peters, "The quest of the Historical Muhammad". In International Journal of Middle East Studies 23/3, 1991, pp. 291-315.

the first body of dissenters in Muslim history formed a party (Shī'ah) devoted to the Prophet's son-in-law, 'Alī, protesting against the political status quo. For centuries discontented groups within Islam joined this opposition party and expressed their disaffection through it. Gradually it developed theologies and rituals of its own, and Shī'ah became a permanent section of Islam.⁵⁰

However, those who are familiar with classical Muslim sources would argue that Sunnī - Shī'ah division in Islam went beyond the apparently political events which gave rise to it after the death of the founder of Islam.⁵¹ By using "opposition party" in the contemporary sense for this dissension, and by giving simply an analysis of the gradual development of the Shī'ah theology and rituals, Smith ignores the complexity of sectarian divisions among Muslims.

Let us summarize Smith's understanding of Islam in the first stage of his scholarly work. In Modern Islam in India, Smith is not dealing with the study of Islam as a "religion"; rather he focuses on certain new developments among Muslims concerning the interpretation of Islam within a particular geographical area - India - and under specific social and economic conditions. His sociological approach, his socialist point of view and his emphasis on the class-content of the Islamic movements in India are all indications of not only what Smith knew about Islam, but also of what he expected from it.

⁵⁰ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 302.

⁵¹ See for instance S.H.M. Jafri, The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam. London: Longman, 1979; S.M.H. Tabataba'i, Shi'a. Translated by Sayyid Husayn Nasr. Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publication, 1981.

In an article written in 1944 Smith criticizes those unacquainted with the new modes of thought and discoveries in the modern study of history, and he refers to his book Modern Islam in India as an exposition of the thesis that "religious developments too reflect or accompany basic changes in social processes."⁵² His major concern in this phase is the challenge encountered by a traditional world view and a traditional way of life when faced with modernity, and the crisis of Islam passing through the process of modernism. He sees part of this crisis in the "impact of an unassimilated modernity on an old-world way of life and its *Weltanschauung*".⁵³ Additionally, in the particular case of Islam in India, he sees Islam in danger "in the sense that the Muslim middle class is in grave danger of extinction, being a petty bourgeois class in a collapsing capitalist world."⁵⁴

Referring later (1957) to "this youthful work", Smith himself acknowledged "among its defects... chiefly the inadequate understanding of Islam".⁵⁵

⁵² W.C. Smith, "The Mughal Empire and the Middle Class: A Hypothesis". Islamic Culture 18, 1944, p. 360.

⁵³ W.C. Smith, "Hyderabad: Muslim Tragedy". The Middle East Journal 4, 1950, p. 50.

⁵⁴ W.C. Smith, Modern Islam in India, p. 184.

⁵⁵ W.C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p. 210.

CHAPTER II

ISLAM AS A LIVING TRADITION

The second phase of W.C. Smith's contribution to the study of Islam is marked by his founding of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University in 1951. In this phase of his life Smith, an Islamicist, tries to acquire a disciplined knowledge of Islam and to create a sympathetic understanding of Muslim culture and religion. The radical principle which makes his approach to Islam different from that of Islamicists before him is his commitment to confront his understanding of Islam with that of those who practice it. Since the matters of faith and belief are so central and deep, he used

to publish things having to do with Islam only after first submitting them, if feasible, for critique and comment to Muslim friends, so as to have their reaction.¹

This commitment showed itself in the structuring of the Institute. Smith set the proviso that half the faculty members and half the student body should be Muslims, in order to ensure that any formulation regarding Islam be subject to dialogue and that they would be mutually acceptable.

The main issues of Smith's works in this phase can be divided into two groups. One group, to which his second major book on Islam entitled Islam In Modern History belongs, continues to deal with the topics central in the first phase: the problem of religion and modernity in

¹ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p. 114.

general. The second group, mostly articles, are the results of Smith's study of Islam in terms of concepts, categories, or symbols. In order to give a clear presentation of Smith's understanding of Islam and his gradual transformation towards the third phase, this chapter will be focusing mainly on Islam in Modern History. The articles will be dealt with in the next chapter, for their topics are more relevant to the discussion of the third phase.

The most significant shift in Smith's concern with Islam in this phase is that his understanding of it is no longer overshadowed by socialist standpoints. Islam In Modern History is a study of Islam and Muslims in the turmoil of the modern world. Based on about ten years of investigation and reflection² the book is viewed by Smith "as some sort of contribution to a politico-economic-social study" as well as an attempt "to discover and to expound the nature and significance of a community's faith."³

1 - THE MUSLIM CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

Smith believes that the Islamic factor is persistently significant in the ongoing affairs of Muslim nations, and he argues that "an understanding of current events in the Muslim world involves an understating of their Islamic quality."⁴ In order to understand the practical role of Islam in modern history, one needs first to understand the theoretical role of history which is "more significant for

² W.C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p. viii.

³ Ibid., p. vi.

⁴ Ibid., p. v.

Muslims than it is for almost any other group."⁵ Much the same applies to the place and the role of society in Islam which is tightly intertwined with the individual faith as well as history. For the Muslim, Smith states, community and history are religiously significant. To become a Muslim means to join the community (*Ummah*) that has undertaken to live in accordance with God's plan. Taking part in it is central to the Muslim's faith. Thus, Islamic history is the history of "that community in motion."⁶ For the Muslims, involvement in history "is at the most only the obverse of their coin; the reverse of which, polished, brilliant, and pure gold, is in the other world. Islam begins with God, and to Him it well knows we shall return."⁷ History, then, is "an endeavor to integrate temporal righteousness in this world with a timeless salvation in the next."⁸ As an attempt to implement a social ideal, as well as in other aspects of their orientation to history, Smith finds Islam (more than any other religion) and Marxism to have much in common.⁹

According to the Muslim conception of history, God has not left humankind without guidance on the matter of how it should live. There is a proper form of human conduct, provided in the message delivered from God to humankind through His messengers from Adam to Muhammad. Human history, thus, started with man knowing what he ought to do.

⁵ Ibid., p. 6; also pp. 16, 18, 19.

⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

But human society faced disintegration and chaos because man failed to act in the manner required. Consequently, God had to choose numerous prophets from time to time to convey the message. Finally, by sending His last messenger, Muḥammad,

once and for all a final, clear statement of his truth and his justice was sent down; a messenger was chosen who would deliver it, interpret it, live it with undeviating precision; a community was launched on its career that would preserve the message with a scrupulous fidelity, would carry it in triumph to the ends of the earth... This time there was to be no error, no distortion, no neglect.¹⁰

If truth has been disclosed before, what is of great importance in this last instance? According to Smith, what was momentous in this case "was the event plus its sequel: the application of the truth, its living embodiment in human history from this point." Smith adds:

Here was not only a restatement of what God has to say to us, but a society developing around that restatement: a society that, grasping firmly the injunctions which are there revealed, dedicates itself to living according to them, and thereby sets forth on reconstruction of human life on earth. This society is not exclusive... nor is it quixotic, for it proceeds under divine support and with divine blessings, is led as it were by the divine hand. God himself has explicitly promised that he will be with the community to sustain and guide it.¹¹

From this perspective on the Islamic conception of history Smith then states that for Muslims

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

both their religious condition today and their potentialities, mundane and other, for tomorrow have to do with a tension between these two - between their sense on the one hand of what Islamic history is essentially, and their awareness on the other hand of what their actual history is today observably.¹²

By emphasizing the role of God in the Muslim perception of history, Smith seems to adopt the fatalistic outlook of the Ash'arī school of thought according to which everything is destined and ultimately controlled by God.¹³ There are, however, other schools of thought too among Muslims. As George Makdisi rightly noted in another context, it is wrong to characterize any particular school in Islam as belonging totally to the right or to the left. Opposing trends have always existed at one and the same time within each and every Muslim School.¹⁴ One needs to mention only the two main ones, the Mu'tazilite and the Shī'ite. The former, being the counterpart of Ash'arism, emphasizes the role of man and his free will throughout history;¹⁵ the latter, the second main branch of Islam, has both theoretically and empirically a different outlook on Muslim history.¹⁶ In short, there does not exist an established and clearly

¹² Ibid., p. 27.

¹³ See George Makdisi, "Ash'arī and the Ash'arites in Islamic Religious History". In Studia Islamica 18, 1963, pp. 19-41.

¹⁴ George Makdisi, "L'Islam Hanbalisant". Revue des Études Islamiques 42, 1973, p. 242.

¹⁵ See Josef Van Ess, "Mu'tazilah". In The Encyclopedia of Religion. Vol. 10, London: Macmillan, pp. 220-229.

¹⁶ See the next two pages.

formulated Muslim perception of history as the one presented by Smith. As H.A.R. Gibb states, "the very basis of Sunni thought, in fact, excludes the acceptance of any one theory as definitive and final."¹⁷ Why Smith looks at history through the eyes of fatalistic Muslims must have other answers. Perhaps his stand is due to his understanding of Islam through the works of certain Muslim scholars such as al-Taftāzānī and al-Ash'arī. Or perhaps his choice of this deterministic outlook can be traced back to his previous Marxist point of view. As mentioned above, Smith believes that Islam and Marxism have many things in common, including their historical orientation. Thus, here perhaps he has overemphasized the role of God in order to give a deterministic outlook to the Muslim perception of history. In any case, this similarity between Islam and Marxism which Smith claims to see is very general and needs much more clarification.

According to Smith, the modern crisis in Islam is due to the fact that the Muslim understanding of history as the successful and prosperous way of life provided by God no longer matches their actual historical situation in modern times. If we accept that such a perception of history is held by most of the Sunni Muslims, the implication is that from the time of the Prophet Muḥammad up until today, the Muslims have enjoyed a very successful way of life on earth and their history has indeed been the fulfillment of the divine guidance or the will of God; and it is only in the modern period that they have been shaken for the first time by a sense of incongruity between their view of history and

¹⁷ H.A.R. Gibb, Studies on the Civilization of Islam. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 148.

their actual situation. But on this view how can their previous failures and defeats in the medieval period, for instance, be explained? Were those also the will of God? Or were there occasions that God left Muslims on their own?

Smith deals with this important issue, in a passing remark, simply to stating that actual Islamic history has had its ups and downs. However, he asserts that there were enough "ups" to corroborate the theory, and enough flexibility to cope with and, for a time, even to negate the "downs."¹⁸ It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss how long it took for each "down" to be overcome by the Muslims, or what factors were involved. If there was enough flexibility in the past to cope with the "downs", why not today?

One must also observe that the Shī'ite Muslims, who from the very beginning have had a very different historical outlook, are nevertheless as affected as the Sunnīs by the malaise of modern times. Comparing certain features of Shī'ism and Sunnism, H. Enayat states that

historicism, another salient feature of Shī'ism, arises from a more fundamental principle, ... the conception of history as a trend of events, not so much following a predetermined course (because contrary to orthodox Muslims the majority of Shī'is believe in human free will), as moving towards a fixed goal, the return of the hidden Imām, the Mahdī, and the rehabilitation of the universe. The Shī'is agree with the Sunnīs that Muslim history since the era of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs (632-61) has been for the most part a tale of woe. But whereas for the Sunnīs the course of

¹⁸ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 40.

history since then has been a movement away from the ideal state, for the Shī'īs it is a movement towards it.¹⁹

The present situation of the Shī'īs, who are equally involved in the crisis, challenges Smith's thesis that the present Muslim crisis or malaise is due to the tension between their sense of what Islamic history is essentially, and their awareness of their actual history today. The point therefore is that narrowing the problem to the Muslim perception of history is nothing but a reductionist interpretation.

2 - ISLAM IN THE MODERN WORLD

Smith's chief concern in this phase, as mentioned above, is the crisis which grips Islam in modern times. He formulates the problem as follows:

The fundamental malaise of modern Islam is a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The fundamental problem of modern Muslims is how to rehabilitate that history: to set it going again in full vigor, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely guided society should and must. The fundamental spiritual crisis of Islam in the twentieth century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls.²⁰

¹⁹ Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982, p. 24.

²⁰ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 41.

In other words, the tension is between Islam as a way of life - as it has been throughout Islamic history - and modernity. We have already examined Smith's perception of Islamic history; let us now turn to his treatment of modernity.

Just as Smith thinks that "religions do change,"²¹ he also considers modernity as being anything but a static entity. He challenges the so-called impact theory, namely, that modernity somehow delivers from the outside blows on the traditional religions. This theory, he argues,

thinks in terms of a religion as something more or less given, a compact entity inherited from the past in a particular form, and thinks of modernization also as something given, if not in a fixed form at least as a process with a more or less fixed direction, usually imposed or at least illustrated by the recent West. Within this polarity, this view envisages the latter, modern culture, which is dynamic, as actively raining blows on the former, the religion, which is thus at least the recipient, if not simply the victim, of external pressure.²²

Smith finds the impact notion inadequate and in some ways wrong because it "minimizes the interiorization of modernity in the religious life," and also because it seriously "underestimates the dynamic, fluid quality of the so-called traditional religious system."²³ Believing that traditional

²¹ W.C. Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion". In Inaugural Lectures. Montreal: McGill University, Faculty of Divinity, 1950, p. 50.

²² W.G. Oxtoby, ed. Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, p. 61.

²³ Ibid., p. 62.

religious systems in general, and Islam in particular, are in a state of flux and evolution, he considers "the impact notion as potentially quite seriously misleading for an authentic understanding of the contemporary Muslim scenes, at any but a superficial level."²⁴ He argues against this view which takes Islam as being inert, a passive recipient of external influences.

In addition to these new conditions which Islam in its modern context shares with the rest of the present-day world, and which are relatively evident, there are other considerations special to Islam. ... Islam is a force, one that has been in motion now for thirteen centuries. Upon the modern Muslim and his society there is the powerful impact of Islam, from behind (and, since it is a religion, from above); as well as the impact of modernity from the side.²⁵

The thrust of Islam and the dynamics of its reaction to the modern world is to be understood "not only in terms of the crucially new environment, but equally in terms of the nature and drive and inner quality of Islam."²⁶ In order to analyze the Islamic situation in the world today, Smith provides an outline of the history of Islam in its modern phase, seeking to illustrate Islam's spiritual quality and its bearing on historical developments, and to interpret the bearing of these events on the contemporary spiritual evolution of Islam.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ W.C.Smith, Islam in Modern History, pp. 5-6.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

Starting with the earliest developments in the modern period of Islamic history, he refers to the eighteenth-century movements of the Wahhābīyah in Arabia and the Walīyullāhī movement in India as the two major purificationist movements which were protests against the internal deterioration of the Muslim community. Renouncing the recent past, they intended to put a halt to internal decadence and to summon Muslim society back to its original purity and order. Insisting that the true Muslim must not accept the contemporary decline, they called for reconstructing again in this world the kind of society that original Islam inspired. It was a century later that this kind of puritanical movements found a new dimension, by directing their opposition at external threat. It was almost two generations after the reformer Shāh Walīyullāh that his ideals inspired socio-political movements directed against the internal decline of Indo-Muslim society as well as the revival of Hindu power and the increasing influence of the British.

Other factors in the developing situation came to the fore with the appearance of the outstanding nineteenth-century reformer Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asad Ābādī (Afghānī) (1839-97). Asad Ābādī is claimed to be "the first Muslim revivalist to use the concept "Islam" and "the West" as connoting correlative - and of course antagonistic - historical phenomena."²⁸ Another aspect of modern Islamic consciousness that he brought into focus was an explicit recalling of the former Muslim glory. He ardently insisted that the resurgence of Islam from its current feeble condition was the responsibility of the Muslims themselves.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

Although he advocated resistance against the West as a threat to Islam, he preached to his Muslim hearers to equip themselves with reason and technology as the West was doing, in order to become strong again. Asad Abâdi indeed revitalized the spirit of Muslim activism which has been a marked quality of Islam in the modern period. His passionate concern for defending and reactivating the mundane aspect of Islam was one of the more conspicuous characteristics of his reformist effort.²⁹

To sum up, according to Smith the three dominant traits of modern Islam which have resulted from these developments from within are internal reform, defense against external threat, and recall of erstwhile Muslim grandeur. Generally speaking, the most striking has been the Muslim transformation in the past hundred years from quiescent passivity into an effervescent dynamism.³⁰

3 - LATER DEVELOPMENTS

In the next stage of the development of these trends, Islamic history witnessed much more vigorous, widespread, and complex moves. Although these Islamic movements in each area had their own particularities with regard to their immediate causes and the local factors involved, they also fit into a general pattern whose traits have been noted above. Moreover, they were affected by certain elements

²⁹ See Nikki R. Keddie, An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal âl-Dîn "al-Afghâni". Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1968.

³⁰ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., pp. 50-51.

introduced in this new stage. Smith considers the following four major factors as having impinged on the evolution of recent Islam: liberalism, nationalism, apologetics, and dynamism.

3.1 LIBERALISM

Considering philosophy and Sufism as two liberating forces in the Islamic tradition, Smith maintains that these two major elements from within contributed to the development of a new trend about the turn of the present century which might be designated as Islamic liberalism. "The intellectualism of the former [philosophy] and the humanism of the latter [Sufism] could provide important bases for reinterpretation."³¹ There is also a third factor in Islamic liberalism, namely, the penetration of the West, which is far from being simply ignored. Smith regards Islamic liberalism as an attitude towards the West which is different from viewing it essentially as a threat. This new trend "welcomed Western liberalism in fact if not in name, and sought to incorporate it into or harmonize it with Islam."³² As discussed in the first chapter, Smith's view is somehow negative with regard to what he calls Islamic liberalism and to instances of liberal Muslim accomplishment. According to him,

In many instances the harmonizing [between Western liberalism and Islam] was permissive rather than creative. It allowed a person to be both a Muslim and a Westernized liberal without conflict; but also without generating a new

³¹ Ibid., p. 55.

³² Ibid., p. 58.

synthesis that might incite to constructive new dreams and new adventures. This is true also of the more indigenous movements that would re-embrace for Islam the rationalist strand in the historical tradition. These would prove revealed Islam and reason compatible, a proof the need for which had not been felt so pressing for some centuries. Yet they hardly expected reason to generate new religious truth; nor looked upon it as in essence divine.³³

As far as the synthesis between liberalism and Islam is concerned, Smith considers the former as absorbed or utilized by the community, as subordinated to prior Islamic purposes. "Liberalism has modified Islam much less than it has been modified by it."³⁴ In other words, Smith tries to understand and trace the thrust of Islam in its on-going modern process, when it is, perhaps more than at any other time, in contact with alien ideas. On the mechanism of this adaptation and its impact on the subsequent tendencies in modern Islam, Smith writes:

The movement, particularly in its humanism, has served to strengthen the this-worldly emphasis of the Islamic outlook. It has assisted in concentrating religious aspiration on temporal programs - such as nationalism.... The reason on which the liberals insisted has been employed to defend the faith. The freedom from constraint that they exalted has been turned to activate without discipline the community's self-assertion. In short, the intellectual aspect of liberalism has been merged into apologetics and its practical aspect into vitalistic dynamism.³⁵

³³ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 68, 69.

3.2 NATIONALISM

Undoubtedly, nationalist movements in all the Muslim lands were affected by the ideas and institutions of nationalism in Europe. Yet, as Smith rightly asserts, this fact should not lead one to conclude that a Western-type nationalism was easily and effectively incorporated into the Islamic world with its different tradition of loyalties and emotions.³⁶ Muslim nationalist movements, in spite of their differences in various areas, had much in common with each other as well as with those of India, China, and the like in Asia. However, what is significant here is mainly their relation to the religion of Islam.

Considering two aspects of nationalism, negative and positive (constructive), Smith argues that these complex Muslim nationalist movements have been compatible with Islam only in their negative aspect. By this he means nationalism in "its overriding negative quality as the drive to reject alien control."³⁷ It is obvious that in the present century a great deal of the energy of the Muslims has been devoted to their struggle to ward off foreign political domination. Since subjection of the community to infidel powers was identified with the decline into which Islamic history had sunk, the need to oust the foreigners became of top priority in order to rehabilitate Islamic history. It has been a marked feature of these movements that in their leadership, "specially in their early stages, primarily religious figures have in some cases been prominent and even

³⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

decisive."³⁸ Moreover, "the driving force of nationalism became more and more religious the more the movement has penetrated the masses."³⁹ Thus, nationalism in the sense of opposition to outsiders

is not only compatible with Islam in its traditional and its religious and social and every other sense. More: it is part and parcel of Islam's modern resurgence.⁴⁰

With regard to nationalism Smith makes clear which aspect of nationalism is compatible with Islam. But as far as Islam is concerned, he has apparently considered a militant version of Islam.

Smith is quite aware of the fact that ambivalence in the relationship of religion and nationalism is yet unresolved, in spite of the contribution that each has made to the other's success:

it would be palpably false to aver that the Islamic was the only element in these movements. ... Yet it would be equally false to suppose that the Islamic note was either absent or in any way discordant."⁴¹

It is often contended that Islam and nationalism are internally harmonious. Smith considers this view to be true only with respect to the positive aspect of nationalism,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴¹ Ibid.

that is, as a constructive loyalty to a national group. He emphasizes that "to respect all members of one's own nation, to envisage its welfare, to evolve an effective loyalty to that welfare, and to work constructively so as to bring it about" is different from the effort "to resist alien."⁴² Since the former positive form of nationalism has been less evident in practice in the Islamic world, he stresses that "the relation between this positive nationalism and Islam has remained almost purely a theoretical problem."⁴³ At the practical level, Smith maintains that "for a religion, opposition is easier than construction."⁴⁴ Therefore,

negative nationalism, yes; the desire and determination to be on one's own. But, once one's group is free, the discipline to get up early in the morning, to work long hours, to turn down bribes, the inspiration to dream, and the energy to actualize one's dreaming, all for national welfare and for national rewards, these have been less obvious. In the past, only Islam has provided for these peoples this type of discipline, inspiration, and energy.⁴⁵

Another important point made by Smith is that in all variations of Muslim nationalism the "nation" concerned has been a Muslim group. "No Muslim people has evolved a national feeling that has meant a loyalty to or even concern for a community transcending the bounds of Islam".⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid., p. 76.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

He summarizes the relation between Islam and nationalism as follows:

The modern Muslim world has accepted and espoused with fervor those aspects of nationalism that are relevant or contributory to the historical rehabilitation of Islamic society, and compatible with Islam's central precepts. It has accepted only superficially, or briefly, or not at all, those aspects that would interfere with or distract from the practical task of that rehabilitation. And except for the Turks, and then to only a limited degree, it has not accepted those aspects that would run counter to traditional Islamic loyalties.⁴⁷

3.3 APOLOGETICS

In the realm of religious thinking, Smith classifies "an almost overwhelming proportion" of current Muslim literature under the heading of apologetics. For there have been endeavors to prove, to oneself or others, that Islam is sound. Much of this defensive literature deals with Islam's relation with modern problems and is addressed to the West. This literature has a "three-fold orientation: against attack, against unbelief, against Westernization."⁴⁸

Criticizing the output of the Muslim apologetics as non-creative and inert, Smith argues that it was the transformation of liberal thought into apologetics which led

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

Muslims "not to re-think Islam but to re-think its defenses."⁴⁹ Indeed, there has been an enormous intellectual price paid. For, as he puts it,

the basic disruption of apologetics is that it has diverted the attention of contemporary Islamic thinkers from their central task - the central task of all thinkers: to pursue truth and to solve problems.⁵⁰

3.4 DYNAMISM

The last element in modern Islam to which Smith refers is dynamism: "the appreciation of activity for its own sake, and at the level of feeling a stirring of intense, even violent, emotionalism."⁵¹ Transformation of the passive and inert nineteenth-century Islam into its twentieth-century ebullience signifies the need and the value of this kind of dynamic which "has been everywhere in evidence." Smith considers this to be "no mean achievement," although his evaluation of it on a practical level is negative. As far as the quality of this dynamism is concerned, he associates it with the lack of any "pattern of control or directional rationale." Consequently, it can

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 89.

become nothing more than the froth of frenzied ecstasy or even the irrational fury of the mob."⁵² He traces the impact of this kind of rousing enthusiasm on all Muslim activities which for this reason have become "furious but blind." For instance, the dynamic of the apologetics succeeded in keeping many loyal to Islam but hindered an intellectual attempt to define Islam in the modern world.

4 - SMITH'S AMBIGUOUS DEFINITION OF ISLAM

Almost two thirds of the book Islam in Modern History is devoted to a detailed study of the modern Islamic crisis in three areas of the Muslim World: the Arab countries, Turkey, and Pakistan. As far as the first and last cases are concerned nothing really new is added to the theoretical discussion presented in the first two chapters. In the case of Turkey, however, one finds certain interestingly different, though sometimes rather inconsistent, views with regard to Islam in general and its situation in modern Turkey in particular. On several occasions throughout his theoretical discussion in the first two chapters, Smith makes an exception for Turkey (by stating "except for the

⁵² Ibid.

Turks").⁵³ Altogether these views give the chapter (pp. 161-205) a particular character. The chapter is also significant in that it presents Smith's views quite explicitly. Some of them will be examined here.

What is quite obvious in this chapter is Smith's attempt to reconcile the distinctive Muslim community of Turkey with the main body of the Muslims. Since the abolition of the institution of the *Khilāfat* in Turkey in 1924 and the coming to power of a secular modernizing elite with their innovative measures towards modernization of the country, Turkey has sometimes been regarded by other Muslims as having abandoned Islam. This, Smith tries to show, is wrong. He argues that "the Turks have not renounced Islam but re-viewed it."⁵⁴ Turkish reformation of Islam, he says, has brought about "the Turk's version of Islam [which] is different from other Muslim peoples both in theory and in practice."⁵⁵ Smith goes even further. He not only accepts this Turkish version of Islam as a successful one in the current crisis of Muslim history, he advocates it to other Muslims. His language with regard to Turks and the Turkish

⁵³ See for instance *Ibid.*, pp. 60 and 72 on liberalism, p. 76 on nationalism, p. 90 on dynamism.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

version of Islam is a deviation from his own method as employed throughout the book for studying and evaluating other areas. It is also a deviation from his thesis that Islam is what its people practice. For how would it be justified to present and advocate the specific version of Islam produced and practiced by a limited section of Muslim population, the Turks, as a model to Muslim populations outside Turkey? To begin with, Smith opens his discussion of Turkey with value judgments. The following sentences are from the early pages of his chapter on Turkey.

This much can hardly be gainsaid; that the Turks are the only Muslim people in the modern world who know what they want. Theirs is the only Muslim nation that has evolved intellectual and social foundations that in the main they can and do regard as substantially adequate to modernity.

The Turks are the only Muslims who can regard their participation in modern Islamic history as reasonably effective.

For any student, if the tension between faith and history lies, as we have suggested, close to the heart of the modern Muslim dilemma, then the success of the Turk's coming to terms with modern history must impel a rather heedful study also of their relation to the faith.⁵⁶

We are not saying that what the Turks practice is heretical or that it is not Islam. Rather we wish to show how, in apparently siding with the Turkish version of Islam, Smith

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

passes an adverse judgement on the views of other Muslims.
To Smith,

a rejecting of the modern Turkish version of Islam altogether as negligible or false [has] often reflected a failing in historical as well as religious viewpoint.

Any understanding of Islam is partial that is not comprehensive and flexible enough to embrace the Turkish instance. ...⁵⁷

Such statements are not in congruity with the assumption on which Smith bases his study that "within the limits imposed by circumstances, Muslims in religious matters as in all their evolution are free, that their handling of their faith depends on them."⁵⁸ But then how can the Muslims' understanding of their faith be partial and incomprehensive?

Moreover, is Turkish Islam, as advocated by Smith, really the one embraced wholeheartedly and practiced fully by the Muslim population of Turkey? Or has it been the one developed and imposed from above by a limited group of revolutionary intellectuals who succeeded to come to power?

In the last thirty years since the publication of the book, many developments within Turkey have illustrated how unpopular the government version of Islam has been among the people. It is a well-known historical fact that what Smith calls "the Turks' version of Islam" is the Islam of the secular elite, imposed upon the Muslim population. It did

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 305.

not genuinely develop from within the Turkish Muslims. In fact Smith acknowledges that his study of the religious reformation in Turkey is the study of the ruling class and their activities.

It is with this group, the intelligentsia, the bourgeois elite, the men who made the revolution and have been carrying through its ideals and practical implications and have enjoyed its fruits - it is with this group that our own study is concerned.⁵⁹

In another place Smith even refers to the fact that whatever religious policy these people adopted it has not been without political motivations.

The Kemal [Atatürk] government, on coming to power through the Revolution, when it suppressed the influence of those same religious authorities and seriously checked the overt expression of Islam that they mediated, did so largely or wholly for political reasons. ...⁶⁰

The inconsistency of Smith's position shows itself when he considers the religious measures, "the Turkish transformation" enforced by this secular revolutionary ruling class, as "development within Islam". He comes to this conclusion merely because he considers them as being a group of Muslims, no matter how small they might have been or what their motivations were.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 187.

Our submission is that, by and large, as a group they [the men and women who have brought about "the Turkish transformation" and those who now participate in it and approve it] are Muslims; that what they have done in the last twenty-five years to the status and form of religion in Turkey is one more development within Islam, a new emergence within its historical, Turkish evolution.⁶¹

Therefore, one can argue that this development is not from within Islam because it fails to meet the least criterion for being so, namely, having religious motivations, being introduced by religiously committed people, and being accepted by the population in a natural way. It is not clear what Smith means by "Islam". Which Islam is he talking about? What has been evolved by a secular political group in Turkey, what the majority of Muslims in other areas practice and the Islam presented in classical texts⁶², all three are given the name "Islam" by him. One can conclude that "Islam" as used by Smith is not clearly defined. Moreover, in spite of the successful adaptation of the Turks to the modern world it is still a question, as H.A.R. Gibb puts it, "whether the 'isolationist' Turkish interpretation supplies the answer to the historical quest of Islam."⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 175.

⁶² See the next chapter on Smith's textual studies.

⁶³ H.A.R. Gibb, Book review of W.C. Smith, Islam in Modern History. In The Journal of American Oriental Society 78, 1958, p. 127.

To bring this chapter to a close we sum up the discussion as Smith himself does. Islam entered "on the modern period of its earthly history at a low ebb in its external fortunes and its internal development, and menaced by outside attack."⁶⁴ The Muslims have tried in several ways to remedy the decline. By purifying the religion from alien ideas and practices, by pushing back their external enemies, by remembering their glorious past, by transplanting new ways and ideas from the West and from modernity in order to rehabilitate their society, by defending their faith, by substituting activism for passivity etc. "Yet it is the very measure of their dilemma."⁶⁵ Considering Islam as a way of life, not as a system of ideas, Smith regards the challenge of history as the main threat to Islam.

Islam is a faith expressed not primarily in a system of ideas, but in a system of life, a community and its ways. The Islamic society is endangered not only from without but from within, and not only its existence but its essence. There is an attack upon Islam by events, considered not from outside but from within its own development; the subversion of Islam as it were, by Islam's own contemporary history.⁶⁶

In its response to the challenge of history, the religion of Islam is seen by Smith as being "alive and dynamic", and as being opened to future development. "Something is being brought to birth."⁶⁷ As Smith puts it,

⁶⁴ W.C. Smith, Op. cit., p. 91.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 297.

the relation between Islam and history has been close - and remains close - Islam as a developing process is that moving point within history at which the Muslim breaks through history to reach out towards what lies beyond. Yet that point remains within history; history always colors it. The development of the rest of the historical process is closely intertwined with the very heart of the Muslims' faith. And the development of the faith, we believe, bears crucially and will continue to bear on the rest of the temporal scene. That the relation between faith and history is close, is confirmed both by doctrine and by observation.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 307.

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH OF OTHERS

The major work of Smith on Islam in the third phase is the book entitled On Understanding Islam (1981). The book is a collection of sixteen articles and papers selected from among those written over a period of more than two decades. Other important works of Smith on the study of religion will also be referred to in the course of the following discussion. In this phase Smith's contributions to the study of Islam, scattered throughout his works, illustrate his wide philosophical and theological programme. Some of these studies belong to the late years of the second phase, to which the previous chapter was devoted. Since they are thematically in line with the topics which he dealt with in the period we have named the third phase, the contents of his aforementioned book as a whole, and his important articles such as "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?" can be considered along with the material of this phase, particularly: The Meaning and End of Religion, Faith and Belief, Belief and History, Towards a World Theology.

A survey of Smith's works since the early 1960s shows that his interests with regard to the study of religion in a broader sense include lexical studies of certain key concepts such as "religion", "faith", and "belief", plus a new approach in the comparative (history of) religion, and finally prescriptions for a world theology. This chapter treats Smith's understanding of Islam in the light of these broader concerns.

1 - RELIGION: The Special Case of Islam

After Islam in Modern History, Smith expands the scope of his study to include the phenomenon usually called religion. He starts his seminal work The Meaning and End of Religion with the question "What is religion?" He finds it impossible to define this term. The core of the book is an inquiry into the word "religion": its Latin origins, its development, its cognates in other ancient and living languages, its uses and abuses, and finally the author's suggestion for substituting the term with two others, "faith" and "cumulative tradition". Smith states that the term "religion" is used in four different meanings:

First, there is the sense of a personal piety. It is with this meaning that we are thinking today when we use such phrases as, "He is more religious than he was ten years ago"; or if we remark that in every community, Christian, Hindu, and the rest, there are some men whose religion is harsh and narrow, others whose religion is warm and open. Secondly and thirdly, there is the usage that refers to an overt system, whether of beliefs, practices, values or whatever. Such a system has an extension in time, some relation to an area, and is related to a particular community; and is specific. In this sense, the word has a plural and in English the singular has an article. In each case, however, there are two contrasting meanings: one, of the system as an ideal, the other, of it as an empirical phenomenon, historical and sociological.

Finally, there is "religion" as a generic summation, "religion in general". Its meaning is inevitably derived in part, for anyone using it, from his sense of the other three. Insofar as it is historical, it is as complex as all "the religions" taken together. Insofar as it is personal, it is as diverse as the men whose piety it synthesizes.

The first sense discriminates religion in a man's life from indifference (or rebellion). The second and third (possibly intermingled) discriminate one religion from another. The fourth discriminates religion from other aspects of human life, such as art or economics.¹

By providing historical evidence, Smith shows how the concept of religion in the West has evolved. He terms its long-range development as "a process of reification: mentally making religion into a thing, gradually coming to conceive it as an objective systematic entity."² At a pre-reified level the term "religion" was meant to be an inner personal orientation. Its meaning gradually shifted from a personal quality of life to an organized system, "from personal orientation to an ideal, then to an abstraction, finally to an institution."³ The names designating several religious traditions indicate the "move from the general concept "religion" to the particularist conceptualization that, after reification has been accomplished."⁴

In the Christian case, the term "Christianity" and the term "religion" show a parallel development. It may suffice to mention⁵ that, according to Smith, the term "Christianity"

¹ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, pp. 48-49.

² Ibid., p. 51.

³ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴ Ibid., p. 52. - See particularly Michel Desplands' La religion en Occident: Evolutions des idées et du vécu / Héritage et projet, 23 /. Montreal: Fides Publishers, 1979.

⁵ The discussion of the historical development of terms like "religion", or "christianity", or names of other traditions is not within the scope or purpose of the

as a "systematic ideal and [as] increasingly intellectualist" became current "only well after the Reformation" and it became standard "only during the Enlightenment." It came into use as referring to "an historical phenomenon" only within the last century.⁶

Although the plural form of "religion" as a systematic entity became standard from the mid-seventeenth century⁷, names such as "Hinduism", "Confucianism", "Buddhism" and the like are modern inventions used since the second half, or the last quarter, of the nineteenth century in the West to refer to the various systems of other peoples as distinct entities⁸.

The Islamic case is different because "of all the world's religious traditions the Islamic would seem to be the one with a built-in name," for "it is not a name devised by the outsiders."⁹ As Smith rightly states, the word "Islam" occurs in the Qur'ān and the Muslims are insistent on using this term to designate their own "system of faith." Since the name is God-given it has sanctions, and the Muslims resist the use of any other names such as "Muhamadanism" or "Islamism" coined by outsiders. Smith considers as significant the uniqueness of the Islamic

present study. Discussion of these issues here is made to provide the theoretical context within which Smith illustrates the case of Islam.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

tradition in this matter of having its own name. He has two basic considerations for answering why it is the case with Islam:¹⁰ "is it an exception to the general rule?" and "what is involved that makes this particular religious community different from all the others on this point?"

His first consideration stems from another difference between the Islamic and other religious traditions, namely, its particular characteristics. He argues that

Islam ... may well in fact be characterized by a rather unique insistence upon itself as a coherent and closed system, a sociologically and legally and even politically organized entity in the mundane world and an ideologically organized entity as an ideal.¹¹

In other words, the Islamic tradition as a named entity for "Islam is more reified than any other of the world's great living faiths."¹² This leads to Smith's second consideration which is historical. He believes that there is an historical process by which Islam has turned out to be the most entity-like among the various religious traditions. Three historical processes, or three processes of reification through which the Islamic world has passed can be identified according to Smith.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 85.

¹³ Ibid.

The first process, a long-range one, goes back to Middle Eastern history and the Middle Eastern religious context. Historically, Islam is the youngest of the world's major religious traditions in the region. The context in which it came into existence was a pluralism of "religions". Thus, an awareness existed that this new-born religious community was one among the others and independent from them.

This was an external force, an evolution in the Middle East chronologically prior to the emergence of the Muslim community and operating upon it from the outside as an historical pressure, acting to mould the new tradition into a pre-established form.¹⁴

Smith traces both the historical and the linguistic development which took place in that area far back to the time of Zarathusthara, but he considers Mānī's role as very significant in the process of systematization of religion. He not only finds in Mānī's writings a plural for a concept of "religion" occurring for the first time in human history; he considers Mani to be the first and perhaps the only major religious teacher in human history to call a system that he proffered "mine" as well as calling it a religion; to have written a scripture consciously; to have consciously played the role of a world prophet; to set up an administrative organization, to systematize a religious community.¹⁵ According to Smith, Mānī's systematization contributed to the crystallizing of other traditions, and the comparison of the Islamic tradition with Mānī is clearly stated:

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

in a way that is not true of any other great religious leader of the world except Mani, Muḥammad to some seems self-consciously and deliberately to have set about establishing a religious system. ... In a sense one could characterize him as, after Mānī, the only "founder of religion" who knew what he was doing.¹⁶

This then is the first process of reification of Islam which is attributable to an "external force" unique to Islam. In the sense that when Islam came into historical existence "schematized religious systems had [already] evolved and in that part of the world the process of systematizing them was developing."¹⁷

The second process of reification of Islam is, Smith states, an internal development taking place over centuries. He considers that the word "Islam" is used today in at least three different but related senses:

First, there is the Islam, the self commitment of an individual Muslim: his own personal submission to God, the act of dedication wherein he, as a specific and live person in his concrete situation, is deliberately and numinously related to a transcendent divine reality which he recognizes, and to a cosmic imperative which he accepts. Secondly and thirdly there are the Platonic ideal and the empirical actuality of the total system of Islam as an institutionalized entity. This is a generalized pattern of the religion in the one case as it ideally is, at its conceivable best, and in the other case as tangible reality, a mundane phenomenon, historical and sociological.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁸ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p. 43.

These three aspects are called by Smith "Islam the active personal faith, Islam the religious system as transcendent ideal, and Islam the religious system as historical phenomenon."¹⁹ The internal evolution, however, has been gradual and the emergence of the word in its third sense is recent, a "late aberration."

Although today the word 'Islam' is used in the three senses, this was not always so. At least the relative proportion of usage was in the past greatly different ... The concept of Islam as a religious system, and specially as an historical system, is increasingly dominant but relatively modern.²⁰

To prove this, Smith studies the occurrence of the word "Islam" in the Qur'ān, and he also examines a large number of book-titles in Arabic, from the eighth to the twentieth centuries A.D.²¹

With regard to the term "Islam" in the Qur'ān, Smith recalls that compared to other related terms such as *īmān* (faith) it is much less used: only eight times. And when it occurs, it refers most of the time to an act of personal faith, which is the first meaning of "Islam", not to a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

²¹ In his article "The Historical Development in Islam of the Concept of Islam as an Historical Development". In Ibid., pp. 64-76, he lists 169 titles, while in The Meaning and End of Religion. p. 298, he declares that he has studied approximately 25,000 book-titles.

religious system.²² This, he adds, is "more in conformity with the traditional usage of the Arabic language" and with the fact that "the Qur'ān is concerned and presents God as being concerned with something that persons do and with the persons who do it, rather than with an abstract entity."²³ The word *aslama*, the verb form of "Islam", means submission to God's eternal word, obeying His command and to choose to recognize it as binding on oneself. "Islam" is obedience or commitment. "It is a verbal noun: The name of an action, not of an institution; of a personal decision, not a social system."²⁴ The early commentators on the Qur'ān like al-Ṭabarī have interpreted the term "Islam" in a dynamic and personal way, while modern commentators have interpreted the same verses in terms of systematized and impersonal statements.²⁵

As mentioned above, Smith investigated a large number of book-titles to indicate the gradual reificationist view of the Muslims over centuries. According to him, the whole process began with secular writers in the community, and it first appeared in the title of books of history and literature. At the end of the nineteenth century, almost all religious writers were using "Islam" in the reified sense.²⁶ In his survey he indicates, for instance, that in

²² W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, pp. 110-112; On Understanding Islam, pp. 46-47.

²³ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, pp. 110-111.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 114-115, 298. On Understanding Islam, p. 57.

all but one of the seventeen of the titles in which the word "Islam" occurs, during the first thirteen centuries of Islamic history,

the term is either correlative with *īmān*, actually or potentially, as the designation of a man's personal acceptance of responsibility before God, or else is used in such a context as to be ambiguously either this or the idealized idea.²⁷

This reificationist trend began rather late, "stemming from the seminal study of Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (14th century) Tārīkh al-Islām."²⁸ Studying the usages in a group of more recent titles, Smith concludes that there has been "during fairly recent times in the Muslim world an increasing and now widespread tendency to use the word "Islam" in the sense of the tangible historical reality that has actually existed."²⁹

It is interesting that Smith comes to believe that the recent transition in the usage has taken place under the impact of Westerners who as outsiders have tended to look at Islam as a mundane phenomenon.³⁰ This is what he means by the third process of external pressure tending towards reification of the term "Islam". The process can be traced back to the latter part of the nineteenth century, and it has basically two aspects related either to the influence of works on Islam written by outsiders, or to Muslim

²⁷ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, pp. 55-56.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 59, 62-63.

apologetics. The modernized Muslim world has been exposed to works written on Islam by outsiders in which the term is used in its reified sense, as a religious system and as a civilization. Translations from these into Islamic languages have contributed to the dissemination of the reified sense of the word.³¹ The term *nizām* (system), often used in the twentieth century, does not occur in the Qur'an and has no precedent in pre-modern Muslim works as referring to Islam as a system which encompasses all aspects of human life.³² Moreover, Smith considers the Muslim use of the term "Islam" in a reified sense as being a direct consequence of apologetics.³³

To sum up, the Islamic tradition, unlike the others, has a built-in name. "The Islamic has been in some ways from the first the most reified of all man's living religious movements ... it has at its birth and throughout been subject to massive reifying pressures."³⁴ At the present time, the word "Islam" is used in three different senses. First, as the designation of a decisive personal act, the self-commitment of an individual Muslim. Secondly and thirdly as an ideal religious system, and as a total Islamic system as an institutionalized entity. Usage of the term in its last sense is, however, predominant and quite modern.

³¹ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 117.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 115.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 117.

In Smith's understanding of the concepts of "religion" and "Islam", certain points are worth mentioning. His study on the term "Islam" is interesting and illuminating. His discussion of the first two processes of its reification, namely, historical pressure and internal development, is particularly important. Although his study of the occurrence of the term "Islam" in the Qur'ān and its different interpretations by classical and modern commentators appears convincing, his substantiation of the theory through examination of book-titles seems inadequate. It is inadequate because he has confined his inquiry merely to the titles, whereas the major bulk of the Islamic literature remains unexplored, particularly *Ḥadīth* literature, which stands second in rank to the Qur'an and its interpretation. As far as we know only one Muslim response to Smith's theory has been made.³⁵ Unfortunately, despite its length, the article, one may say, is itself an illustrative example of what Smith is trying to prove, namely, a modern conceptualization of "Islam" as an objective systematic entity, particularly from an apologetic perspective. The author argues on several points against Smith, although he himself is trapped in his understanding of Islam as a system. Moreover, he has failed to substantiate his own argument with adequate evidence.

ʿAlī Qulī Qārāʾī contends that Smith's conjecture to the effect that Muslims' conceptualization of Islam as a religious system is recent and under the influence of

³⁵ ʿAlī Qulī Qārāʾī, "The Meaning and End of Religion: A Critical Analysis of W.C. Smith's Approach". In: Al-Tawhīd 3/3, 1985, pp. 163-189; 3/4, 1986, pp. 154-197.

Western thought, is baseless.³⁶ For Qarā'ī, the Qur'ān refers to "Islam" in terms of a religious system and as an institutionalized entity and he recalls the progressive stand taken by Muslims "in different fields including religious [sciences], ethics, philosophy and sciences" during the middle ages. Qarā'ī criticizes Smith for ignoring "the possibility of the influence of Muslim thought on the process of intellectual awakening in the West, and the accompanying development of conceptualization."³⁷ In other words, Qarā'ī argues that Muslims, far from borrowing from the West the reified meaning of the concept of "religion" and of "Islam", preceded the West in the process of reifying the concept of "religion" in general, and "Islam" in particular.³⁸

Qarā'ī also does not find Smith's statistical illustration of the occurrence of the term "Islam" in the Qur'ān sufficiently convincing to conclude that it is basically used there in the sense of personal piety.³⁹ He also accuses Smith of selecting his data in a way that fits his theory at the expense of ignoring others. But he himself does not provide the reader with specific and clear evidence to the contrary.

In an examination of Smith's article "The Historical Development in Islam of the Concept of Islam as an Historical Development" (1958), Albert Hourani, historian of

³⁶ Ibid., No.3, p. 172.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., No.4, p. 168.

the Middle East, questions the former's thesis that the meaning of the word "Islam" has changed in the course of Islam's history from personal piety and submission to an ideal religious system or a system of doctrines, then to the religious system as it developed in history, and finally to a civilization.⁴⁰ Hourani expresses doubts on the evolution of the meaning of the term as described by Smith, and he asks: "Does this division into four phases emerge from an empirical study of the material, or is it determined by Professor Cantwell Smith's own "self-image"?"⁴¹ According to Hourani, it is rather Smith's self-image that has "led him to select and emphasize what agrees with his idea of true religion."⁴²

Hourani maintains that Smith has summed up the reality of religion into "a direct call of God to the individual heart and a direct human response to it."⁴³ Everything else is human construction and subject to change because human beings do change. Then he asks, "Is it a possible interpretation of what Muslims or indeed Christians have thought about their religion in the past?"⁴⁴ He believes that Smith reduces the Islam in which its followers have believed throughout history to its very minimum. This reductionism ends up including only a few mystics, and is a

⁴⁰ Albert Hourani, "Introductory Remarks". In Bernard Lewis & P.M. Holt, eds. Historians of the Middle East. London: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 454.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 455.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

distortion of what has happened. For the "minimal conception of Islam includes not God and Man alone, but God, Man, the Qur'ān and the Prophet."⁴⁵

As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, Smith's inquiry into the concept of "religion" led him to suggest that the term should be dropped because it is "confusing, unnecessary, and distorting - confusing and unnecessary especially in the first and fourth senses, distorting in the second and the third."⁴⁶ The main reason for putting forward such a proposal is that Smith as a historian of religion is dissatisfied with the way in which man's religious life has been studied in the past. He maintains that

the history of what has been called religion in general and of each religion, is the history of man's participation in an evolving context of observable actualities, and in a something, not directly observable by historical scholarship.

Any historiography ... distorts what it is reporting if it omits either of these two aspects; and yet is doomed to flounder if it attempts to combine them.⁴⁷

The previous study of man's religious life is "inadequate insofar as its concept of religion has neglected either the mundane or the transcendent element in what it has studied, and has been confused insofar as its concept has attempted

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 456.

⁴⁶ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 50.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

to embrace both."⁴⁸ He suggests to work rather with two separate concepts: a historical "cumulative tradition", and the personal "faith" of men and women.⁴⁹ Personal faith means here: "an inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person; the impingement on him of the transcendent." Cumulative tradition, on the other hand, stands for "the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit ... anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another, and that an historian can observe."⁵⁰

In his foreword to The Meaning and End of Religion, (ed. 1978) John Hick lists the positive effects of Smith's substitution of "religion" with "faith" and "cumulative tradition" as follows:

- (1) to release us from the notion of the religions as contraposed socio-theological entities, and so from the unprofitable question, which of these is the true religion?
- (2) to identify the religiously all-important, and at the same time philosophically problematic area of inner personal faith and experience;
- (3) to free study of the cumulative traditions from monolithic illusions, thus allowing the rich detailed variety to show itself, not only between traditions, but also within each tradition.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 156, 194.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 156-157.

⁵¹ Ibid. (ed. 1978), p. xvii.

"Faith" and "Cumulative tradition" and their special Islamic cases will be discussed later in this chapter. Let us first examine some critiques of Smith's suggestion.

Ninian Smart objects to Smith's proposal on the following grounds:

- (1) Because we use the word "religion" it does not follow that there is a common core. Compare "sport", "entertainment" - legitimate locutions.
- (2) Even if "religion" cannot be defined (though I believe it can), it does not matter much (can we define "of", "red", etc.?).
- (3) Cantwell Smith ... knocks out "religion" and "religions" by replacing them with cumulative traditions and faiths. He writes: "This is not the place to enter on a systematic study of faith's expressions." But this terminology implies as much reification as "religion" and "religions."⁵²

Smart's first objection sounds correct because, as his examples suggest, there are certain words which have many meanings without containing a central meaning. With regard to his second and third points, it should be said that Smith is defensible. First, Smith's reason for dropping "religion" is not because it is not fully definable. He writes:

The word "religion" has had many meanings; it ... would be better dropped. This is partly because of its distracting ambiguity, partly because most

⁵² Ninian Smart, "Truth and Religion". In John Hick, ed. Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions, London: Sheldon Press, 1975, p. 46.

of its traditional meanings are, on scrutiny, illegitimate.⁵³

As Edward Hughes has rightly put it, "Smith's argument with "religion" does not simply concern its definition, but rather the confusing nature of its several meanings."⁵⁴

Smart's third objection is definitely "a misreading of Smith"⁵⁵ who does not speak of many faiths, but of different forms of faith. He resists the usage of "faith" in plural because for him "faith" is a quality of living, but the plural form of it implies distinct entities as the term "religions" does. In order to prevent reification and segmentation, Smith corrected the text of his seven essays in the collection entitled Religious Diversity to read "forms of faith" wherever "faiths" had appeared in the original publication.⁵⁶

Huston Smith considers Smith's proposal of eliminating "religion" as a "quixotic thesis", and describes it as a "surgery so radical as to be raised to the art of decapitation."⁵⁷

⁵³ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 194. See also note 46 above.

⁵⁴ Edward J. Hughes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Theology for the World. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ W.G. Oxtoby, Religious Diversity, p. xix.

⁵⁷ Huston Smith, "Faith and its Study: What Wilfred Smith's Against, and For". In Religious Studies Review 7/4, 1981, pp. 307-308.

In any event, in spite of the fact that Smith's prediction of 1962 that the word "religion" would "disappear from serious writing and careful speech within twenty-five years"⁵⁸ did not come true, it seems that his revisionist thesis has left its impact and has won many of the qualifications and clarifications he sought.

2 - FAITH: The Islamic Instance

For the sake of clarity Smith divided "religion" into the two spheres of "faith" and "tradition". Here, we will examine his exposition of these two concepts with particular reference to their Islamic instances.

As far as faith is concerned, Smith has provided us with a number of formulations of the concept.⁵⁹ E.J. Hughes considers the following four as the main aspects of faith to be found in Smith's works.

First, faith as a capacity for ultimate meaning refers to the ability of persons to orient their lives according to a symbolic vision of reality that transcends mundane facts. ...

Second, faith as a response to transcendence is the human capacity to react to a transcendent dimension of life. ...

Third, faith in its broadest characterization may be viewed as a human quality such as hope or charity. [The first and the second] are illustrations of this quality ...

⁵⁸ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 195.

⁵⁹ In an appendix to Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Theology for the World (pp. 230-234) E.J. Hughes has included 37 descriptions of faith provided by Smith in his work.

Fourth, faith refers to a pattern of meaning - a total way of seeing the world.⁶⁰ ...

Although Smith regards faith "as almost the most important of all human qualities",⁶¹ he does not explain the nature of personal faith.

Without yet knowing what it is, we may nonetheless affirm with confidence that there is some personal and inner quality in the life of some men, and to it we give the name faith.⁶²

Smith rather describes certain functions that faith performs in human life.

At its best it [faith] has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enables one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one's own life, and meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable no matter what may happen to oneself at the level of immediate event.⁶³

Faith is "a dialectical process between the mundane and the transcendent, a process whose locus is the personal faith and the lives of men and women, not altogether observable and not to be confined within any intelligible limits."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁶¹ W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. vii.

⁶² W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 171.

⁶³ W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 12.

⁶⁴ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 187.

If the nature of faith is undefinable, it does as a personal quality have expression, as is also the case, for instance, with another human involvement, love. Less personal expressions of faith, however, fall according to Smith under two chief headings, ritual and morality, which in some instances overlap.⁶⁵ Since human qualities are not constant, faith as a living quality is not a fixed something, nor is it equal for the *engagés* men of faith.

Faith varies. Some have faith that is large, rich, strong, serene, and that renders them generous, courageous, compassionate, patient, noble, creative. Others have a version of faith that is meager, spasmodic, unimaginative or bitter, self-righteous or hypocritical. Both extremes of faith, and every gradation between, are to be found, we now can see, in every community across the globe.⁶⁶

As a personal *engagement*, faith lies beyond that sector of men's religious life that can be subject to an outsider's inspection. "Yet, like other of man's personal involvements, in art, love, ambition, joy and sorrow, though it cannot be comprehended, it can be apprehended."⁶⁷

In his exposition of Muslim faith, Smith takes the Qur'an as a source and critically explores the frequency and usage of certain key words, especially *īmān* (faith). He then studies faith in later Islamic history by examining the

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

⁶⁶ W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 131; see also The Meaning and End of Religion, pp. 189-191.

⁶⁷ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, pp. 170, 188; Faith and Belief, p. 6.

commentaries of certain classical and medieval theologians on the Qur'ān, concentrating especially on the formulaic definition - the *Shahādah* (the Islamic witness to God) - as an illustration of Muslim faith expressed in a rational, verbal form.

This approach is in line with Smith's basic conviction that "the study of religion is the study of persons". Smith, seeing Islamic faith as "a divine-human complex", proposes that the study of it should begin with its human component. What he is concerned with is to explore what faith means to Muslims and what are its various constituting elements according to Muslims.

One point of great significance for Smith is that faith is not the same thing as belief. This difference is emphatically demonstrated in his discussion of the Islamic faith in particular. For the first observation that entails his discovery that the two are not the same occurred in his encounter with a classical Islamic text on theology by al-Taftāzānī, as well as through a study of the Qur'ān:

Dramatic for me was my discovery that I was wrong - most of us were wrong - in linking faith too tightly with believing, or confusing the two. Linked they have been, no doubt: Faith and belief are not the same, and in earlier times no one thought that they were, I discovered, ... it was with some excitement therefore that through a study of the Qur'ān I came to question in a focussed way whether belief is indeed religiously central, or was classically seen as being so.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p. 110.

While studying a translation of al-Taftāzānī's text,⁶⁹ he observed that translating the term *īmān* as "belief" did not cohere with what al-Taftāzānī was saying. "From this observation eventually grew twenty-five years later [his] two recent volumes, Belief and History and Faith and Belief".⁷⁰

Indeed, Smith's discussion of the Islamic faith is one of the best cases to which he has applied his thesis, the idea which is not very much elaborated in The Meaning and End of Religion.⁷¹ The Islamic instance proves that the relation between belief and faith is more subtle than it appears at first sight. For as Smith writes:

Belief is here closely linked with faith; almost, it would seem, fused with it - and yet it turns out that believing is not a religious category in this powerfully conceptualist system.⁷²

As a matter of fact, Smith answers the question "what is faith?" by saying what it is not. As mentioned above,

⁶⁹ Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, A Commentary On The Creed of Islam: The Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī. Translation with introduction and notes by Earl Edgar Elder, New York: Columbia University Press, 1950.

⁷⁰ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p. 136.

⁷¹ In The Meaning and End of Religion Smith does not explain the content of faith beyond saying that it is a personal quality of human life. His book The Faith of Other Men (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963.) is, however, an elaborate application of his theories. One chapter in the latter book is devoted to "Muslim Faith". The same chapter was later reprinted as the second chapter of his book On Understanding Islam (1981).

⁷² W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 33.

Smith has found the translation of the Arabic word *īmān* as "belief" wrong. In other words, he presents the Qur'ānic approach to faith by contrasting it with the modern concept of belief. He argues that the classical conception of belief, a long time ago, did mean to have "faith", but this is not the case any more.⁷³

In order to elucidate the notion of belief as different from faith, Smith turns to the concept of knowledge in terms of certitude and correctness in what one knows. Believing, in the prevalent modern sense of the term, differs from knowing in that "it involves one or other of again two things, and perhaps both: (a) lack of certitude; (b) open neutrality as to the correctness or otherwise of what is believed."⁷⁴ Believing in that sense signifies that the question of objective intellectual validity of an opinion held by a person or a society is theoretically left unresolved.

Arguing that "believing so conceived has become the religious category *par excellence* of the modern time", Smith goes on to show that such a category is alien to the Qur'an,⁷⁵ in which "words for 'knowing' are frequent and

⁷³ A detailed historical and theoretical discussion of how the meaning of "belief" and "believing" have changed would take us far afield; however, a gist of the problem insofar as it relates to our discussion here is presented. Belief and History (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), pp. 36-70, and Faith and Belief, pp. 3-20, 105-128, provide us with a complete discussion of the subject.

⁷⁴ W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 35.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

emphatic," and "the notion of knowledge is reiterated and vivid."⁷⁶ He focuses his inquiry on the two key words *amana* (with *īmān*, faith, as its verbal noun); and *ẓanna* (to think, to hold an opinion). He argues that *īmān*, "faith in the Qur'ān is closely correlated with knowledge," whereas "*ẓanna* ... comes into sharp collision with it."⁷⁷

According to Smith, "in the Qur'ān's case, knowledge comes first - given by God; faith is the positive response to it, *ẓanna* is the pitiful and puny alternative to it."⁷⁸ In other words, faith in the Qur'ān is a human response to the transcendence. He illustrates the matter as follows:

The fundamental concept in the Qur'ān, overwhelmingly vivid, is that of God, presented as Creator, Sovereign, and Judge, powerful, demanding, succouring, majestic, laying upon mankind inescapable imperatives and offering us inexhaustible rewards. The fundamental category on the manward side is that of faith: The positive recognition and acceptance of the divine summons, the committing of oneself to the demands, and thus being led to the ultimate succour.⁷⁹

By providing a similar analysis of concepts opposed to *āmāna* in the Qur'ān, such as *kafara*, *jahada*, and *ẓanna*, Smith comes once again to the conclusion that faith is not belief. Particularly in the Qur'ān the concept of faith (*īmān*) cannot be the same as belief because it is closely linked with the idea of knowing. For Smith, the word *ẓanna*

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p. 130.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

is the equivalent of the current usage of the English word "believing".

In the Qur'ān, then, my submission is, *ẓanna* does not mean simply to believe, but to believe wrongly. Insofar as the other term, *āmana*, faith, means 'to believe' at all, it means, even those who would like to press that interpretation would have to admit, to believe rightly. More accurately: insofar as there is an intellectual component in *āmana*, it means, not 'to believe' but 'to recognize': to become aware of the situation as it in fact is. All this is because, of course, implicit in the Qur'ān, and also explicit in it, is the view that the truth is given, is clear, is known.⁸⁰

Smith emphasizes another difference by saying that "modern 'believing' is an anthropocentric concept, whereas the whole Qur'ānic world-view is theocentric." He goes on to say that "it is theocentric not only as a whole, but in all its parts. The concepts with which it operates are concepts whose meaning, implication, and presuppositions are saturatedly theocentric."⁸¹ In sharp contrast with the Buddhist belief system, Smith finds that the Muslim system makes "belief in God spectacularly central", to the extent that he as an observer is tempted to say that "no other community on earth has put so much weight [on it]."⁸² Indeed, Smith's position with regard to faith is, as one of its critics rightly puts, extremely theocentric:⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 131-132.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁸² W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 33

⁸³ E.J. Hughes, Op. cit., p. 34.

Some theologians, both Christian and Muslim, would say that faith is a sheer gift of God, and cannot be induced by anything that men and women do. Fair enough, I shall myself say that in a moment.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Smith's analysis of faith remains anthropocentric. For him faith is a divine-human complex whose human component should be the subject matter of religious studies. It appears in Smith's analysis of faith in general and in its Islamic case in particular that there exists a twofold relationship between faith and transcendence. On the one hand, as in the Islamic instance, the impingement of transcendence (the divine summon) evokes faith. And yet, faith enables a relationship with transcendence. The same kind of reciprocity pertains to the relation of faith to a human being. On the one hand, faith gives meaning and coherence to human life to the extent that it is considered as the most decisive quality of a human being. On the other hand, faith is the human response to God's summons, the self-submission and commitment to divine imperatives.

The best example for Smith's understanding of faith as being anthropocentric is his analysis of the *shahādah* or Muslim creed:⁸⁵ "I bear witness that there is no god but

⁸⁴ W.C. Smith, Towards a World Theology, Faith and the Comparative History of Religion. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981, p. 169. In spite of this explicit statement Langdon Gilkey understands Smith's view on faith as being anthropocentric. (Langdon Gilkey, "A Theological Voyage with Wilfred Cantwell Smith". Religious Studies Review 7/4, 1981, p. 303.)

⁸⁵ The usual Western practice of calling this two-phrase formula a "creed" is misleading according to Smith; its

God, and that Muḥammad is His prophet", as well as his analysis of the definition of "faith" and of the commentaries on it by classical Muslim theologians.

In his analysis of the two parts of the *shahādah*, Smith points out that the Muslim witnessing formula is not merely an acknowledgement of God's unity or of the status of Muḥammad. Rather, it is to be taken as an assertion of one's commitment to God's imperatives and of the intention to act accordingly. This is another way of how faith differs from belief as a mere conviction that God is unique. Faith goes beyond belief by producing an action which is appropriate to that conviction.

The proclamation of God's oneness is in some ways more a command, to worship Him alone, than merely an invitation to believe that He is there alone. Faith differs from belief in many ways, and goes beyond it; one way is that faith in God's oneness is a recognition of His unique and exclusive authority, and an active giving of oneself to it. Like the Christian, the classical Muslim theologian has seen faith as a commitment.⁸⁶

Classical Muslim theologians conceptualized faith in the formula *al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq ...* (Faith is *taṣdīq ...*).

There have been many commentaries of this formula. Also, the word *taṣdīq* has been rendered by various English terms. In his lengthy discussion of all these, Smith is

relevance for Muslim life is only partly correlative with that of the creed for Christians. He calls it rather "Symbol". (The Faith of Other Men, pp. 57-58.)

⁸⁶ W.C. Smith, The Faith of Other Men, pp. 59-60.

critical of the standard Western understanding of the Islamic notions of faith, which he thinks is inadequate at least in relation to knowledge and to moral action.⁸⁷ For Muslims, unlike Christians, for whom "faith has come to be thought of as having to do with something less than knowing", faith comes out of knowledge.⁸⁸ With al-Taftāzānī and al-Ghazzālī, he contends that faith goes beyond knowledge and produces actions. He accepts their interpretation of *taṣdīq* as being the recognition of a trust and a response to it. He prefers the French word *s'engager* as the most precise counterpart of *taṣdīq* and he quotes the following lines from al-Taftāzānī to prove his point:

The true nature of *tasdiq* is not that there should take place in the mind the attribute of veracity to what is said, or to the person who says it, unaccompanied by a yielding to it and an accepting of it for oneself. On the contrary, it is rather a yielding to and accepting of that, such that the term 'surrender' applies to it, as Imām Ghazzālī has made clear.⁸⁹

Smith then concludes that to be a person of faith is to have a particular quality,

a particular quality that brings one to the point of committing oneself to act in terms of what one has recognized as right. This is *taṣdīq*, and to have it is to have faith.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, pp. 137-153.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 153.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 157.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

The same kind of analysis applies to the second half of the *shahādah*, to bear witness that Muḥammad is the Prophet of God. This statement, Smith argues, is not primarily an affirmation of Muḥammad's status. Rather, it is a statement affirming the position of the person who cites it with regard to the message that Muḥammad brought and its validity. To state this is

to assert that the message purveyed by Muḥammad is authentic. If you believe this, then you are accepting as incumbent upon you in an ultimate moral sense the practical duties that flow from this tradition. For you are recognizing the obligation to perform them as not of human origin but of divine.⁹¹

3 - CUMULATIVE TRADITION

As explained above, Smith suggested that the term religion be dropped and replaced with "faith" and "cumulative tradition". A definition of each has been given above.⁹² Let us now examine the relation between faith, the interior quality of a person, and its external expression, cumulative tradition.

Cumulative tradition refers to "the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit."⁹³ It is wholly historical, dynamic, diverse, and observable.⁹⁴

⁹¹ W.C. Smith, The Faith of Other Men, p. 66.

⁹² See note 50 above.

⁹³ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 157.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 161, 168.

The cumulative tradition as a concept, therefore, is not inflexible or final, either in content or in form. It is not given by the world, but is a human construct offered to order what is given. It is a device by which the human mind may rewardingly and without distortion introduce intelligibility into the vast flux of human history or any given part of it. It refers ... to something intelligible, and empirically knowable, though not to an independent entity, intrinsically coherent or self-subsisting.⁹⁵

This visible aspect of man's religious life, which is the subject matter of the history of religion, has a twofold relation to faith. As expression of faith, it is based on faith. Therefore, "apart from men's faith, those traditions themselves would not be there."⁹⁶ On the other hand, these traditions as the "empirically provable" aspect of faith provide the possibility of accomplishment for faith, and they function as that by which faith is evoked in successive generations.

It is because the materials of a cumulative tradition serve each generation as the ground of a transcendent faith that they persist. The objective data of a tradition exist in this world and are observable by an historian; but they continue to exist and to be observable because for the men and women who use them they serve as windows through which they see a world beyond.⁹⁷

Cumulative tradition is both the "material form" of the faith of past generations and "the context for the faith of

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 168-169.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

each new generation as these come along."⁹⁸ Or, in a more refined expression:

It is faith that generates the tradition in the first place, and that continues to be its *raison d'être*.

Faith is nourished and patterned by the tradition, is formed and in some senses sustained by it - yet faith precedes and transcends the tradition, and in turn sustains it.⁹⁹

Cumulative tradition is mundane, wholly historical and thus subject to change. This applies also to Islam:

It is a fact irrefutable and profoundly significant that the Islamic tradition has *become* (and one can hardly emphasize the word too strongly) what it has observably become; that it has become so by gradual and complex historical processes that can be studied, and through the activity of human beings whose particular role in the cumulative process of that becoming can be examined.¹⁰⁰

With this in mind, let us now turn to Smith's personalist approach and his new methodology for religious studies.

4 - A NEW APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Smith is critical of methods in religious studies which exclude the personal, inward and hidden aspect of human life

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

⁹⁹ W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 164.

which he calls faith. Such methods miss the human side of the relation to the transcendent and the human quality of their subject matter. He criticizes over and over again the social scientists and humanists who have taken "the observable manifestations of some human concern as if they were the concern itself."¹⁰¹ This is what also happened in the past in the field of religious studies; that is, the externals of religion - myths, symbols, practices, doctrines etc. constituted the object of the study and were examined separately emphasized without any relation to the persons involved. These things are not in themselves religion, and such a method is not an appropriate one for Smith. For he has repeatedly mentioned that "the study of a religion is the study of persons."¹⁰²

For Smith, faith is the basic and central religious reality. Well aware of the fact that humankind is religiously divided, he sets himself the task of facilitating global understanding in religious matters as a key-element for the long term goal of global integration and global community. Faith is constant in human history; it varies from one religious tradition to another only in form, not in kind.¹⁰³ Thus faith should be the ultimate subject matter of the study of religion.

Smith considers two stages of scholarship in this field: The first stage, which he characterizes as the stage

¹⁰¹ W.C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and why?". In W.G. Oxtoby, ed. Religious Diversity, p. 143.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁰³ W.C. Smith, Towards a World Theology, p. 168.

of "the accumulation, organization, and analysis of facts", started with the "Age of Discovery", when Christendom began to explore other places and peoples. The second stage is mainly characterized by the fact that the compilation of data about other religions is supplemented by the active presence and cooperation of other peoples themselves and "a large scale face-to-face meeting among persons of diverse faith."¹⁰⁴ Therefore,

our plea would be that from now on any study of externalia recognize itself as such; that only those deserve to be accepted as studies of religion that do justice to the fact that they deal with the life of men.¹⁰⁵

Considering the new world situation in which people are close to each other more than ever before, Smith feels compelled, and tries to persuade his colleagues in the field of comparative religion, to write for a world audience.

It is no longer legitimate to write in this field for any but a world audience. Many think that they are addressing books and articles to one particular community (normally their own), but these are in fact read by others, and especially by that other community that they are about.¹⁰⁶

In a basic and radical manner, Smith suggests that "no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

acknowledged by that religion's believers."¹⁰⁷ "Religion" here means "faith in men's hearts." Talking about the meaning that religion has for those of faith, Smith says:

an outsider cannot in the nature of the case go beyond the believer; for their piety is the faith, and if they cannot recognize his portrayal, then it is not their faith that he is portraying.¹⁰⁸

Finding the traditional conceptual categories inadequate for studying religion, Smith goes further and argues that the existing modes of knowledge, namely, subjectivism and objectivism, are also unable to provide us with an accurate knowledge of religion. The key concept that he develops at length in Towards a World Theology (1981), and which he proposes as an alternative mode of human knowledge, is the concept of *corporate critical self-consciousness*. Arguing against the presupposition in the Western conceptual pattern that the only alternative to the objective is the subjective, Smith maintains that

in addition to the subjective, my individual and internalist awareness of something or someone, or of myself, and to the objective, the impersonal, externalist knowledge, there is a third position, which subsumes both of these and goes beyond them; and that it is this that we should posit as our goal - in the humane field, man's knowing of man. I call it corporate critical self-consciousness.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

He argues that humane knowledge, knowledge of other men, has always been self-oriented, be it in the form of subjectivism or objectivism. Subjectivism eludes both ourselves, insiders, as well as outsiders. For, we are ignorant of much that goes into our actions, feelings, choices etc. Objectivity, the externalist approach, which was developed to get over the inadequacies of subjectivity, fails to provide true knowledge of what it studies, particularly in the case of human affairs. "Objective knowledge is inherently oriented towards the alienation of persons from each other."¹¹⁰ In an objective mode of knowledge, others are "objects" for us and so misunderstood because they have been conceived wholly from the outside. Setting forth these criticisms and many others, Smith urges us to go forward to a larger vision: that of a *corporate critical self-consciousness*.¹¹¹ By *corporate self-consciousness*, in contrast to external knowing, he means participation in human consciousness. Thus, each tradition, as it has historically developed in interaction with others, must be understood only in terms of those interactions and the meaning and the role that its symbols, its rituals etc. create in the consciousness of those involved, the insiders. Giving the example of temple worshipping, Smith clarifies what he means by "*corporate*" and "*critical*":

The insider, if dedicated to full knowledge, full self-consciousness, must and ideally will incorporate into his or her awareness the truth that outsiders see, so far as it be true; and the external observer, if resolute to attain to true knowledge, must incorporate into his or her

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 64-74.

understanding not only the critical analyses from the outside, in all their rigour, but also the reality that the temple constitutes in the life of the pious devotee, which after all is the primary reality of the temple as a fact in human affairs.¹¹²

This is also what he calls the personalist stage in the understanding of the history of religion, of culture, and indeed of human history. The personalist approach is the participation in the consciousness of the insiders. Giving as an example the Western understanding of India, Smith illustrates four successive stages that such understanding has gone through:

First, ignorance. Secondly, impressionistic awareness of random parts of the culture (an outside subjective stage); thirdly, a growingly systematic and accurate yet insensitive and externalist knowledge of facts (an objective stage); and more recently, and richly promising, the beginnings of serious and even profound humane understanding of the role and meaning of those facts in the lives and culture of the persons involved. I call this last stage personalist.¹¹³

Indeed, Smith introduces a new principle of verification.¹¹⁴ In corporate critical self-consciousness,

¹¹² Ibid., p. 66.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 62.

¹¹⁴ Antonio R. Gualtieri, Theological Evaluations by Christians of the Religious Faith of Non-Christians. A Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Divinity, McGill University, Montreal, 1969, (pp. 121-211) provides a ground against which the novelty of Smith's principle of verification can be compared with the criteria of other Christian theologians for judging the faith of others.

the accuracy of observation is testable by both the experience of other observers, a verification procedure in objective knowledge, and the verification by the subject or subjects.

No statement involving persons is valid ... unless theoretically its validity can be verified both by the persons involved and by critical observers not involved. The proper goal of humane knowing, then, the ideal to which the human mind should aspire, academically, scientifically, is not objectivity but corporate critical self-consciousness. My submission is that this will yield truer knowledge; that with anything less we betray intellectual accuracy.¹¹⁵

The general point that Smith has made is that in the new phase of comparative study of religion, the object of inquiry has on a new scale become personal. Moreover, "the subject of inquiry also has been taking on a personalized quality."¹¹⁶ Since both the subject and the object of inquiry have become personal, the relationship between them also becomes personal and there arises the need for a dialogue between them.¹¹⁷ But Smith expects to go beyond this stage of a face-to-face dialogue. He looks forward to a side-by-side conversation

where scholars of different faiths no longer confront each other but collaborate in jointly confronting the universe, and

¹¹⁵ W.C. Smith, Towards a World Theology, p. 60.

¹¹⁶ W.C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?". In W.G. Oxtoby, ed. Religious Diversity, p. 148.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

consider together the problems in which all of them are involved.¹¹⁸

Religious diversity is considered by Smith as one of these "problems", and "comparative religion [which] may become the disciplined self-consciousness of man's variegated and developing religious life"¹¹⁹ may increase the self-consciousness in which all share the responsibility for a common future. As Smith says,

the traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of other man's religion was that of an impersonal presentation of an "it". The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalization of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a "they". Presently, the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a "we" talking about a "they". The next step is a dialogue, where "we" talk to "you". If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that "we" talk with "you". The culmination of this progress is when "we all" are talking with each other about "us".¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 154.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

CONCLUSION

A sound evaluation of Smith's contribution to the study of Islam must be based on the fact that the study of Islam has been an important aspect of Smith's increasing concern to understand the faith of others. Particularly in the third phase, as analyzed in the present study, Smith is convinced that

the attempt genuinely to understand one religious movement involves one in a requirement to understand all, and to understand religious diversity as a fact of human life, and the long-term shift in categories as a fact of human thinking.¹

As the very nature of Smith's work indicates, it can be concluded that his studies of Islam, even though valuable and interesting, consist simply of issues selected in accordance with his attitudes in different phases of his life and the direction that his activities took. However, this does not suggest a disjunctive tendency in Smith's thinking and writing, "the scope of the author's interests and capabilities is vast" and indeed "he is one of the relatively few scholars who combines a sound grasp of Islamic history, literature and institutions with a mastery of religious studies in general."²

Initially, a Marxist outlook guided Smith's study of modern Islam in India. At that stage he had not yet

¹ W.C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p.41.

² Frederick M. Denny, book review of On Understanding Islam. In The Middle East Journal, 36, 1982, pp. 442-443.

differentiated between faith and cumulative tradition and was still unaware of the issue of "reification" with regard to Islam. He talked about Islam as a religion, as a system, in the same way as the modern Muslims he was studying had talked of Islam. Also, like social scientists whom he criticized later, he studied the externalities of Islam. He studied the cumulative tradition of modern Muslims in India.

His study of Islam in this phase focussed on a specific Muslim society going through transformation from a traditional outlook to modernity. His study of Islam was not the study of a religion in the conventional sense. An openly socialist approach inspired his treatment of Islam in India and led to an analysis relying on economic and social classes. Smith's assumption about religion in general and Islam in particular was that it should function as an ideology. In the two subsequent phases there is a shift from the social aspect of Islam as a system to faith as an inner personal quality.

Although a considerable change did take place in Smith's approach to Islam in the second phase, one can hardly talk about a radical break. His major work on Islam in this stage, Islam in Modern History, is basically a study of present-day Islamic cultural and social life. The main goal was still to study what Islam as an empirical reality means to the Muslims in the modern time.³

Smith's writings on Islam do not offer a systematic treatment of Islamic dogmas and theology, which has been the

³ See for instance Islam in Modern History, p.8.

main concern of prominent Islamicists.⁴ The references in his works to the Prophet Muḥammad's life and role, to the issues of revelation, and to the Muslim conception of God are incidental, scattered, non-comprehensive statements. His main interest in the first two phases of his career as an Islamicist was in the study of the manifestation of Islam in the lives of Muslims in modern times.

In the third phase, Smith's study of Islam provides a kind of case study for a general theory concerning the meaning of tradition and faith. Smith's personalist approach allows him, to a significant degree, to transcend the prevailing Western outlook on Islam and to see it from the Muslims' point of view. The purpose is to put an end to any academic manipulation of external data, which results in the distortion of what faith and tradition are all about. Statements about the faith of others should be assessed by the persons about whom these statements are made. This kind of verification procedure is central to any comparative approach in religious matters. In the particular case of Islam the adoption of this personalist approach also serves an extra purpose for Smith. Criticizing the political and economic stand of the West towards the Islamic world, Smith explains the reasons why the Muslim discovery of the West has in large part been a painful discovery of Western

⁴ See for instance Fazlur Rahman, Islam, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, and Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958; H.A.R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, New York: The New American Library, 1955; Ignaz Goldziher, Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law, translated from the German, Vorlesungen über den Islam (Heidelberg, 1910), by Andras & Ruth Hamori, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981; Joseph Schacht, An Introduction to Islamic Law, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964; W. Montgomery Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973.

antipathy to Islam.⁵ He cites similar reasons for the failure of Western scholars, with a few exceptions, "to understand more accurately and to interpret more appreciatively the Islamic tradition."⁶ He rightly maintains that

on the whole the work of Occidental Islamic scholarship, not always reverent or constructive, has appeared to many Muslims as in basic tendency disintegrative of Islam in its central formulations, as one more attack upon and threat to the faith.⁷

Therefore, by stressing personal faith over reified system as a central issue, Smith succeeds to a large and significant extent to overcome the shortcomings of his predecessors in this respect. His attitude towards Islam, and particularly Muslims in modern times, is altogether sympathetic,⁸ and it succeeds relatively well in "doing justice" to the various aspects of Islam as faith and as tradition. Smith's major concern in studying Islam and dealing with religious issues has been to provide a solid and valid representation to facilitate mutual understanding and dialogue between religiously diverse human communities. The following quotation at the end of the preface to Islam in Modern History illustrates Smith's readiness to learn from others - in this case from the Islamic tradition:

⁵ W.C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, pp. 70-71.

⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

⁸ His sympathetic view is best presented in his book Islam in Modern History.

I wonder whether I might be allowed to close as a classical Muslim writer might have done: May God forgive me if my book misrepresents a people or its faith, and if on the other hand it may serve as any contribution to truer understanding, then to Him be the praise.⁹

⁹ Ibid., pp. ix-x.

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