

several of the commentaries by Muslims writers, and in general tried to follow the interpretations of al-Baydawi. He did not in any way attack Islam, but he was writing for a readership which was still somewhat afraid and hostile, and so, in order to pacify his readership he may have included a few remarks which these Muslims thought were more critical than in fact they were. It is also possible that they had seen an edition of Sale's work published in America between 1882 and 1886, to which a Christian missionary, E.M. Wherry, had added further notes of a definitely polemical character, and it may have been thought that these came from Sale himself.

In the nineteenth century the interests of the Western European scholars came to include not only the religion itself but also the whole history of the Islamic peoples, and not least the history of Muhammad's own career. Here it takes an effort of imagination for people of today to understand the conditions in which these scholars were working. Virtually all the books they wanted to consult existed only in manuscript, and the manuscripts were scattered over dozens of libraries. Moreover there were no facilities for photo-copying. One of the first tasks of the scholars was to make a list of the older Arabic books still in existence. The labours of many scholars led to the monumental History of Arabic Literature by Carl Brockelmann, which by 1942 had expanded into five large volumes. It is now in the process of being further updated by the Muslim Turkish scholar Fuat Sezgin under the title of Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums. In 1991 Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation was established in London by Shaykh Ahmad Zaki Yamani to continue aspects of this work, and in particular to ensure that all important manuscripts were securely preserved.

From listing the manuscripts and giving descriptions of their contents the European scholars passed on to editing and publishing. For this they selected those manuscripts they considered important, which, in historical matters, were generally the works of the earliest Muslim writers. Thus they realized that for an understanding of the career of Muhammad it was necessary to have the early standard Sira of Ibn Hisham, and this was edited and published by Ferdinand Wustefeld at Gottingen in 1858 and 1860. This edition followed the methods developed by European scholars for the editing of Greek and Latin texts, and was a careful piece of work. Another important edition of a text was that of the Qur'an-commentary of al-Baydawi, published in Leipzig in two volumes in 1846 and 1848. It is important to keep such facts in mind, since they show that Western European scholars were genuinely trying to achieve an objective knowledge of Islam.

Just as the men of the Enlightenment criticized and rejected some historical views traditionally held by European Christians, so, when Western scholars came to study Islamic

history, they began to throw doubt on some traditional views. One such was the view widely held by Muslim historians that the rule of the Umayyad dynasty was not a proper caliphate but a kingship (*mulk*). The historians expressing this view were writing under the Abbasid dynasty, and wanted to uphold the legitimacy of that dynasty and to justify their replacement of the Umayyads. From the early sources available to the European scholars, such as the works of poets, it was easy to show that the Umayyads regarded themselves as upholders of Islam and were so regarded by many of their subjects (3). This and many of the other points criticized by the Western scholars were secondary matters. Some, however, such as their questioning of the authenticity of many "sound" Hadith, might seem to be more serious; but my personal opinion is that in the end Muslim scholars will be able to show that this questioning does not affect the use of "sound" Hadith as a basis for the Shari'a.

My own general position on such matters is that while the application of the discipline of historical criticism to Islamic material may have thrown doubt on views handed down by tradition among Muslims, it has not weakened in any way the central assertions of the Islamic religion. What I would readily admit, however, is that, while the Western scholars were genuinely trying to give an objective factual account of many aspects of Islamic religion and history, they showed little appreciation of the positive values of Islam as a religion. Here I see Islam as having over the centuries enabled millions of people to lead meaningful life even in conditions of great difficulty, such as those of a Saharan oasis.

- Notes:** 1. Quoted from J. Hick and 3. Hebblethwaite (eds.), Christianity and other Religions: Selected Readings, London, Collins, 1980, 82f.
2. Watt, Muslim Intellectual, Edinburgh university Press, 1963, 181-3.
3. Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, Edinburgh university press, 1973, 82f.

There came to be general agreement on certain general principles, such as that "the more difficult reading is preferable" (*difficilior lectio potius*). The thinking behind this is that it is more likely that a scribe will substitute something familiar for something unfamiliar than that he will substitute the unfamiliar for the familiar. I made use of this principle in discussing the correct spelling of the name of the great Muslim theologian al-Ghazali. The derivation of this *nisba* from *ghazzal* (spinner) is more understandable than a derivation from an obscure village Ghazala; and so the argument is that it more likely that Ghazali would be wrongly changed to Ghazzali than the other way round.

Literary criticism was not concerned only with establishing a sound text, but also tried to discover how writers used their sources. In the nineteenth century much work of this kind was done on the Bible. The first five books are known as the books of Moses, though it was obvious that he could not have written them all since at the end of the fifth there is an account of his death. An early theory of the scholars was that there were two sources or strands of tradition in these books, which they called J and E. The distinction was largely based on which Hebrew word was used for God: J had *Jehovah* (*Yahweh*) and E had *Elohim*. Eventually, however, scholars realized that this did not account for everything in the books, and spoke of two further sources called D and P. D consisted of passages expressing the attitudes specially associated with the book of Deuteronomy (the fifth), while P consisted of material of special interest to priests from a priestly source. The scholars further held that the work of combining these sources to give us the books as we now have them must have involved many writers over several centuries.

There was a somewhat similar search for sources for the first three gospels in the New Testament, those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. These are known as the synoptic gospels because their descriptions of events in the career of Jesus are similar and they follow more or less the same order. The fourth gospel, on the other hand, that of John, omits many events mentioned in the first three, but includes other events which they omit, notably several early visits to Jerusalem. Some of the first scholars of such matters took the view that the gospel of Mark was the earliest, and that the other two had used it to provide the framework for their presentation. They had slightly abridged it, and then added material from another source which came to be known as Q (from the German word *Quelle*, source), but they had added this material at different points in the framework. As time went on, however, and scholars examined the question of sources in greater detail, it was realized that this theory of two sources, Mark's gospel and Q, was much too simple. The latest view seems to be that there were one or two earlier versions of each of the three gospels before they reached the form in which we now have them.

I have spoken of these matters here because it is important that non-Christians should realize that the new disciplines which developed in the nineteenth century were applied in the first place to the Christian religion, and that some of the views first put forward were felt by ordinary Christians to be attacking their beliefs. Among the earlier scholars there were indeed some who were rather sceptical in religious matters. Gradually, however, new scholars came on the scene who were also devout believers, and these were able to show that the results of the new disciplines could be accepted in such a way that nothing essential to the Christian faith was rejected, and that on the contrary these disciplines could give believers a deeper and more mature understanding of many aspects of their faith. Some traditional beliefs had to be rejected, but these were points of secondary importance, such as the belief that Moses had personally written much of the books ascribed to him, and that the three men, Matthew, Mark and Luke, were solely responsible for the first three gospels.

So far I have been trying to give an idea of the general way in which Western European thought developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and how in the nineteenth century this was applied to the study of the Christian religion. By 1800 travel to many parts of the world had become much easier, and many Western Europeans were fascinated by aspects of the ancient civilizations of Asia. It seems to have been partly this fascination, and partly sheer intellectual curiosity, that led some individuals to look more closely at Eastern religions. I have the impression--though I may be wrong--that there was to begin the study of other religion with more interest in Buddhism and Hinduism than in Islam. Certainly throughout the nineteenth century more and more attention was given to the study of religions, and in the twentieth century it has become customary to speak of Comparative Religion or Phenomenology of Religion as an academic subject. In this study an attempt is made to describe the religions as an aspect of human life and culture. They are presented as they appear to an outside observer who is looking at their place in the life of the societies where they are found. At the same time the question of their truth or falsity is deliberately left aside. This is in accordance with the emphasis on objective facts in nineteenth century thinking.

Even earlier there had been one or two European scholars who tried to treat the religion of Islam objectively. Notable among these was Hadrian Reland, professor at Utrecht, who in 1705 produced a Latin account of Islam in two volumes. A little later in 1734 there appeared an English translation of the Qur'an by George Sale with a "Preliminary Discourse" in which he gave a similar but much shorter account of the religion. Sale's translation has in recent years been unfairly criticized by some Muslims. Sale had a very good knowledge of Arabic, had read

some of the writers of the Enlightenment professed a form of philosophical deism. The German Enlightenment was less anticlerical than the French, and showed much interest in the philosophy of history and in the whole intellectual development of the human race.

The Enlightenment, of course, was only one trend in Western European thought. The Christian churches did not lose much support, and their theologians and other thinkers continued to flourish. Most educated people, however, were eventually affected in some ways by the Enlightenment. In many matters a more secular outlook became widespread, that is, an outlook that was non-religious without being anti-religious. This gradually altered the conception of world-history. Previously the events recorded in the Bible had been an important part of world-history, but now most historians concerned themselves almost exclusively with secular history, while only those historians more closely connected with the churches looked at Biblical history, and the history of Christianity or "Church history" became a subject distinct from general history.

Out of all this turmoil of thought there appeared in the nineteenth century the new disciplines of historical criticism and literary criticism. In these there was an emphasis on objective fact, perhaps coming from the achievements of natural science, and a desire to support historical and other beliefs by references to objective facts. The Enlightenment had encouraged people to question accepted historical beliefs, and one such that came to be doubted before the middle of the nineteenth century was the Biblical dating of the world. The book of Genesis has genealogical tables of the descendants of Adam which tell how long they lived and when their sons were born. On the basis of these figures and of later history it had been calculated that the world must have been created in 4004 BCE. In the early nineteenth century, however, there had been important advances in the science of geology, and it was becoming obvious to the geologists that the world must have been in existence long before 4004. This clearly threw doubt on the Biblical account of the early history of the world.

I mention this point because it happened before 1857 when Charles Darwin produced his revolutionary theory of the evolution of the human race from lower forms of life. Darwin's theory was, of course, a more obvious denial of the Biblical account of creation, and as such was at first felt by most Christians to be an attack on their faith. In their opposition to evolution they had the support of many scientists who did not immediately accept Darwin's theory. As early as 1871, however, one Christian writer was claiming that evolution was not contrary to the Bible. Nowadays most Christians accept the fact that the human race has evolved from lower forms of life, and also hold that this is not contrary to the belief that God has created the world. There are indeed small bodies of Christians, especially in the U.S.A., who reject evolution and insist

that what they call the Biblical teaching of "creationism" is the final truth.

Since this difficulty over evolution has been felt by many Muslims, it will be worth saying a little more about it. Firstly, it is important to distinguish between the fact that the human species has evolved from lower forms of life and the theories as to how this has come about. All scientists are now agreed about the fact of evolution, but there are disagreements between them about the theories. Secondly, those Christians who uphold "creationism" seem to think of God's creation of the world as his origination of it, that is, as his first bringing of it into being. This conception of creation, however, is contrary to that found in both the Bible and the Qur'an. There creation is a continuing process, and God creates every individual human being and every animal and plant. When creation is understood in this way, there is no difficulty in holding that God created some generations of animals slightly different from the preceding generation so that in the course of thousands of years new species could emerge.

During the nineteenth century archaeology developed, and this led to the discovery of much information about ancient civilizations, including those of Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. The information which scholars now had about the background of Old Testament history confirmed the general correctness of the Biblical picture of the conditions of life in the period from Abraham (about 1800 BCE) until the return from exile (about 500 BCE). It is now also accepted that the main outline of Biblical history for that period is sound, though one or two details may be questioned. Thus no record has been found in Egyptian material of anything resembling the exodus of the Hebrew people or the disaster to the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. This last point does not make the Biblical account wholly false, for it might be that only a small detachment of the army was involved and that it was not led by Pharaoh personally. Recently some evidence has been found which suggests that some of the twelve tribes of Israelites were never in Egypt and only joined the main group at a later period. This again does not mean that the Biblical account is to be rejected, but it shows that what the Bible gives is sometimes a simplified version of events. We have to keep in mind that the Bible was not attempting to give objective history as that is now understood, but was showing how God had delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and then had continued to support them; and this remains true even if not all twelve tribes were slaves in Egypt.

When we turn from historical matters to the new discipline of literary criticism, it would seem that this first developed in respect of Latin and Greek authors after the renewal of interest in these at the Renaissance. It was found that in the course of the copying of manuscripts by scribes mistakes had crept in, and scholars spent much time and energy comparing manuscripts and trying to discover and correct these errors.

THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN THE WEST

By W. Montgomery Watt

In recent years many Muslims have come to think that the Western scholars studying Islam were doing so in order to attack it and try to weaken it. This was a profound mistake, and the chief purpose of the present paper is to help Muslims understand what the Western scholars believed they were doing. I would certainly admit that there have been some attacks on Islam in the last fifty years, but these have been made by members of relatively small Christian groups, who were neither scholars with an academic reputation nor part of the mainstream of Christian thinking. To justify this last statement it is worth quoting a passage from the section on Islam in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, issued by the Second Vatican Council in 1965:

"The Church also regards with esteem the Muslims who worship the one, subsistent, merciful and almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to man. Islam willingly traces its descent back to Abraham, and just as he submitted himself to God, the Muslims endeavour to submit themselves to his mysterious decrees. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, without, however, recognizing him as God, and they pay honour to his virgin mother Mary and sometimes also invoke her with devotion. Further, they expect a day of judgement when God will raise all men from the dead and reward them. For this reason they attach importance to the moral life, and worship God, mainly by prayer, alms-giving and fasting. If in the course of centuries there has arisen not infrequent dissension and hostility between Christians and Muslims, this sacred Council now urges everyone to forget the past, to make sincere efforts at mutual understanding and to work together in protecting and promoting for the benefit of all men, social justice, good morals, as well as peace and freedom".

This is an official statement by the largest body of Christians in the contemporary world, and clearly outweighs any contrary statements by members of small groups.

I am here mainly concerned with how Islam and other religions have been studied in the West since about 1800. I believe that in this period Western scholars have on the whole been trying to give an objective account of these religions, that is, to describe them as they appear to a neutral observer looking at them from the outside. In earlier centuries there was admittedly hostility to Islam among European Christians. Serious study of Islam may be said to have begun in the twelfth century C.E. At that period, of course, it was Islam which was the imperial power through its occupation of much of Spain. Moreover the Spanish Muslims were at a higher and more advanced level of general culture than

the peoples of Western Europe. The Latin Christian scholars learnt Arabic and in places like Toledo had access to Islamic sources and produced much true information about Islam. Their overall picture of the religion was distorted in various ways. They emphasized such matters as that Islam had spread by the sword, that it encouraged sexual laxity, and that Muhammad had various moral faults - points which Western scholars now know to be false. What these Latin Christian scholars were doing, however, was to try to show their fellow Christians that their own religion was superior to that of the Muslims, even though the Muslims were superior to them culturally and perhaps also militarily.

This distorted conception of what Islam is then continued to have a great influence on European perceptions at least until the eighteenth century, and it still has a slight influence in some quarters despite the efforts of scholars to correct the errors. It has to be kept in mind, however, that for many centuries Western Europeans still tended to be afraid of Islam. The Christian reconquest of Spain from the Muslims was completed in 1492, but by that time a new Muslim power had come upon the scene, the Ottoman Turks, and they were occupying southeastern Europe. For a time the Ottoman empire stretched from Hungary to the Crimea in southern Russia. Twice--in 1529 and 1683--the Ottoman armies besieged Vienna in the centre of Europe, though on both occasions they were unsuccessful. It was not until after the failure of the second siege of Vienna that it became clear to the Western Europeans that Ottoman Power was declining and that they themselves had become much stronger militarily. After this the general fear of Islam decreased, and it became possible for Western European scholars to take a more objective view.

Let me now turn to look at intellectual developments in Western Europe. In the fifteenth century there had begun a great intellectual awakening known as the Renaissance. This was linked with the recovery of much of the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and Europeans came to feel that they were the inheritors and continuators of that great culture. This affected many different areas of intellectual life, notably literature. At the same time great advances were being made in the natural sciences, the climax being the discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton. There was also a growth of fresh philosophical thinking, led by men like Descartes and Locke. From all this there came in the eighteenth century what is called the European Enlightenment - a widespread movement of thought, perhaps specially influential in France and Germany. At its heart was a belief in the almost infinite power of human reason and in human ability to control events. Along with this went opposition to authority and tradition, and in France to clerical authority in particular. Existing religions, including the various forms of Christianity, were considered superstitious and out-of-date, though