

Islam and Other Religions: The Shi'ite View

In the Name of God, Most Merciful and Compassionate

Islam is based on two realities: the blessed personality of the Prophet Muhammad, who was chosen exactly fourteen lunar centuries ago to deliver God's message and to be the leader of mankind; and the Qur'an, the Book from God which is the Prophet's enduring miracle and which contains God's words in the form of intellectual and practical teachings of a universal nature.

These two realities must be considered as one of the most important factors in the development and perfection of human life, or rather, they are the most important factor to have manifested itself over the course of fourteen centuries in the faith and practice of hundreds of millions of men, extending its influence deep into every aspect of their society.

It is true that of the world's religions Islam is the youngest and that its followers are fewer in number than the sum of the adherents other faiths, yet Islam is possessed of certain distinguishing characteristics which sets it apart from other religious ways. For example, if we refer to the sacred books of Hinduism, and in particular the Veda, we see that the religious teachings presented there are almost exclusively of an ascetic nature and at the same time that they are directed towards a minority of the religion's followers. Thus, the majority of Hindus are excluded from deriving direct spiritual benefit from these sacred books.

Buddhism and also Christianity display with Hinduism the same exclusively ascetic outlook in their teachings. In the case of Christianity this is obvious from the four Gospels and the other basic religious texts. There are no practical injunctions or social laws and moreover philosophy and rational thought are looked upon with disfavor.

The Divine Sacrifice and the remission of the sins of mankind are doctrines which reduce the relevance of injunctions concerned with this world.

Other religions have either ceased to draw men to themselves, such as Sabeanism and Manicheanism, or else are limited to a particular race of people, such as Judaism.

Thus it is only Islam which gives first importance to rationally demonstrable beliefs and positive individual and social injunctions, as, it is hoped, the present paper will make clear.

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