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Definition of Islam

Wilson: One of the important things in any discussion is to define the subject. As we shall proceed to discuss Islam, I would like to hear a definition of the meaning of the word "Islam" because it is an Arabic word. I have heard more than one definition of this word; so I would like to hear yours. "Muslim" is another Arabic word which ought to be defined for the benefit of the non–Arabs who may read it very often without understanding its full meaning, or may confuse it with the word Islam.

Chirri: The original meaning of "Islam" is the acceptance of a view or a condition which previously was not accepted. In the language of the Holy Qur'an, Islam means the readiness of a person to take orders from God and to follow them. "Muslim" is a word taken from the word Islam. It applies to the person who is ready to take orders from God and follow them.

"Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was an upright (man), a Muslim; and he was not one of the Polytheists." 3:67

The two words, however, acquired specific meanings after the introduction of the message which was conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad. The message which was revealed to Muhammad is called Islam, and to profess the belief in his message is also Islam. Muslim, also, has come to mean the person who follows the message of Muhammad and believes in its truthfulness.

Wilson: What is the relation between the original meaning of Islam and the specific meaning which the word acquired after the advent of Muhammad?

Chirri: The new meaning of the word is closely related to the original one because Muhammad stated that his teachings contain the teachings of all the previous prophets and all the Divine commandments. When a person professes the belief in the truthfulness of Muhammad and pledges to follow his message, he, in fact, will be stating his readiness to obey the orders of God unconditionally.

Wilson: There are certain procedures prescribed, for example, by Christianity for a person who likes to join the Christian faith. Baptism is one of the sacraments which, according to most of the Christian denominations, a new convert has to have in order to become a Christian. Are there any prescribed

procedures to be followed by a person who likes to join the faith of Islam?

Chirri: No sacraments or procedures are prescribed for a person who likes to join the faith of Islam. One needs only to pronounce or to believe in the contents of the Declaration of the Faith:

"I bear witness that there is no God but the Almighty God and that Muhammad is a messenger of God."

Wilson: Why is such a pronouncement sufficient for the admission of a person into the faith of Islam?

Chirri: When a person states that he believes in the truthfulness of Muhammad, he actually states that he believes in all what Muhammad introduced and in all his teachings. This includes all the Qur'anic teachings, all the deeds and all the sayings of Muhammad, whether in the matter of belief or in the area of practice.

When a person believes in the contents of the Declaration of the Faith, he automatically becomes a Muslim. His pronouncement of the Declaration is a proof to the other Muslims that he is a believer in Islam. Because of this, no Muslim can deny him the admission into the faith because he is a believer in Islam and needs nothing more beyond it.

Wilson: Is a new convert considered equal to a person who was born a Muslim?

Chirri: A Muslim convert is equal to any other Muslim in the eyes of the Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, a convert has more advantages than a born Muslim for two reasons:

- 1. A convert deserves a bigger reward from God than a born Muslim. A convert becomes a Muslim usually after a great deal of research and some psychological crisis, because changing religion is not an easy task. It takes a great deal of courage and effort on the part of the convert, while a born Muslim receives his religion by inheritance.
- 2. A convert is considered, by his conversion to Islam, pure and free of any previous sin. All his previous sins are wiped out entirely. He will be responsible only for the sins which he commits after becoming a Muslim. Thus, if a person becomes a Muslim in the early morning, after sunrise, then he dies before noon, he is entitled to enter paradise without having practiced or performed any of the devotional duties which a Muslim is required to do. He did not have to perform morning prayer because his conversion to Islam took place after sunrise, nor did he have to perform the noon prayer because he did not live until noon, the prayer time.

Wilson: Sometimes I find that Islam is called "Deen-Al-Tawhid" and sometimes "Deen-Al-Fitrah." Since the two names are Arabic, they should be defined for the benefit of the non-Arabs. The reasons for which Islam has these names should also be made clear.

Chirri: "Deen–Al–Tawhid" means the religion of the belief in the Oneness of God, and "Deen–Al–Fitrah" means the religion of the nature or the religion which is in accordance with human nature.

Islam is called the religion of One God because its main theme is the unity of God. The doctrine of One God is the most emphasized and repeated principle in the Holy Qur'an. When Islam was introduced to the world, people were mostly idol-worshippers. Some religions preached the Oneness of God but in an unclear form. Some of them ascribed to God an anthropomorphic image. The most important point of the contents of the new heavenly message was to correct the idol-worshippers and to remove whatever clouded the concept of One God.

Islam is called the religion of nature because its teaching is acceptable to the human mind when the human mind is freed from illogical thinking and superstition.

The Prophet Muhammad said:

"Every human being is born in a state of pure nature; but through the influence of his parents, he may become non-Muslim"

When a person is freed from illogical thinking, he can easily, just by looking at the order of the universe, conclude that the universe has only One Creator. It is easy to accept a teaching that calls upon us to believe that the over-four-billion-year-old universe had been created by an Infinitely Old Creator. But it is neither simple nor easy to identify that Creator with a mortal whose birth took place four billion years after the creation of the universe.

It is natural to accept a teaching that calls upon us to believe that the Creator of the universe is Absolutely Fair, Just, and Merciful, and that such a Just and Merciful Creator does not burden any soul with the sin of another; and that He does not require any person to pay for the sins of others. The teaching of Islam seems to be acceptable to the human mind, unless the human mind has been exposed to illogical teaching. This is the reason why Islam is called the religion of nature.

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