

centuries ago, Islam was here to stay. In spite of the Sunni-Shi'i division arising from early political differences (and not atypical of major religious traditions) Islam has remained intact. Within the Muslim world, it will remain so. As an academic discipline in our American universities, Islamic Studies is therefore by no means an irrelevant subject. This is all the more reason, then, to go about it accurately and sensitively.

Martin, Richard C., ed.
In: *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*.
U. of Arizona, Tucson, 1985.

This material may be protected by
Copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code)

12

Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies *Review Essay*

This material may be protected by
Copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code)

FAZLUR RAHMAN

In this volume, many contributors have discussed methodological problems of various kinds in the study of the history of religions, as relevant particularly to Islam. Some also suggest approaches to the solution of methodological problems, or clarify their nature, notably Earle H. Waugh (Chapter 3) and Frederick Denny (Chapter 4). Some authors, notably Andrew Rippin (Chapter 9) and Marilyn Waldman (Chapter 6), recommend the application of particular methods to the study of Islam. My basic purpose in this brief review is not to consider all the important things said in this variegated and rich volume, but rather to address myself to certain issues raised by Abdul-Rauf's sensitive protest against the way many Western scholars of Islam have handled their subject and his contention that non-Muslims may study Islamic history, for example, if indeed they can study it with fairness, but that they may not study the nature and origins of Islam, for they can never truly understand it. My aim is to focus on the meaning of this contention in order to make it more precise; in doing so, I expect that certain conclusions will follow which may affect specific meth-

of religions, notably, the historical, phenomenological, personalist, and so-called literary methods.

The problems of misunderstanding and misinterpretation are universal in all human experiences, including the natural sciences, where a scientist may misconceive or misinterpret his or her experiments. The corrigibility of wrong scientific results, however, is relatively easy in principle because of easy access to verification. This ease of data gathering and verification is basically facilitated by the fact that the object of study is not esoteric but public, and the subject of study is "unprejudiced" and open-minded, while the instruments are "trustworthy." Almost none of these conditions is available quite in this sense when we come to the study of human affairs. Leaving aside the question of instruments, here the subject is neither so unprejudiced nor the object so public. By "prejudiced" I do not necessarily mean consciously or willfully prejudiced, but rather preconditioned in a manner that is not conducive to the study of the object as it is. Yet it is a fact that many human affairs can be studied, if not absolutely correctly, certainly satisfactorily. A marriage may, in some respects, be an esoteric affair, yet it has an important public aspect that can be witnessed, compared, and contrasted, and brought under certain generalizations even if already existing generalizations have to be adjusted in order to apply them to a certain given case.

When we pass to the realm of religion, however, we are confronted with a phenomenon that consists in values, convictions, and feelings that involve the utmost depths of the human mind or, rather, the human psyche. Religions certainly have observable expressions and measurable vehicles or institutionalized manifestations, as Jacques Waardenburg has pointed out, but, as he has also said, it is precisely the meaning of these expressions, vehicles, and manifestations that is at issue.¹ Can an outsider understand their meaning adequately if not fully? Or must his or her attitude be, to an extent, empathetic or participatory? If participation is demanded the question must be asked whether or not all believers in or followers of a given religion, that is, all members of a given religious community, understand their religion adequately if not fully. If they do not, as I think it is fair to conclude, then in what sense is *their* attitude to their religion participatory in a meaningful way? Wilfred Cantwell Smith has suggested that a statement about a religion by an outsider would be correct (or adequate?) if the followers of that religion say 'yes' to it. This principle is excellent and will be discussed a little later to make its meaning more precise. But in the meantime we should take notice that

especially among religions with well-defined orthodoxies or concrete traditional cores some followers continuously make statements that others—perhaps a majority—reject. Can such phenomena be treated only as family feuds? We should also note in this context that what many Muslims may have regarded as being of great importance to Islam in one period may differ from what they may have emphasized in an earlier or later period. Such historical differences are quite separate from regional differences within a broad and basic framework of belief and practice.

Insiders and Outsiders

In *Other Minds*, John Wisdom argued that the owner of an experience has privileged access to his or her experience, which cannot be shared by any other person. When A says (truthfully), "I have a toothache," and when B then reports to C, "A has a toothache," B is obviously not sharing A's toothache. At least B, if he has previously suffered a toothache, can analogize on the basis of that experience and understand A's statement, and so also with C. But can we, on this account, go on to say that when A says (truthfully) "I have a toothache," and B says to C "A has a toothache," these two propositions do not have the same meaning? Wisdom rejects this conclusion absolutely, for the meaning of a proposition cannot be made relative to having or not having a certain experience. A's having a toothache is a fact that is universally true (or false) regardless of who states the case.²

The picture is not as simple as that, however. Facts, of course, are not private; their meanings are universal. That is why in the above example the fact of the experience of a toothache will be equally true even if A is not having a toothache at the time he asserts the proposition to B but had it in the past. In this case, there would appear to be hardly any difference between A's statement to B and B's report to C, particularly if B also had experienced a toothache in the past. Indeed, the meaning of this proposition would remain unchanged even if B never had a toothache in his lifetime. Having said this, however, we must go on to say that although the meaning of this proposition is universally true, this does not imply that the *understanding* of that meaning is also universal. That Muslims are monotheists and that Christians are trinitarians are universally known facts, but are they universally *understood*? Before answering, the statement just made needs to be amended; instead of saying Muslims

are monotheists and Christians are trinitarians, one should say, "Muslims say they are monotheists," and "Christians say they are trinitarians." The distinction is important for reasons that will follow shortly with the discussion of the question of internal differentiation within religions.

For a meaning to be "understood," it has to become meaningful to someone, so that it ceases to be purely impersonal. Now, being "meaningful" can have more than one sense. In one sense something can be meaningful in an inimical way. In this sense, for example, Şalāh al-Dīn Ayyūbī and Richard the Lionhearted were highly "meaningful" to each other, and few would deny that they "understood" each other in some definite sense of the word. So, too, a fanatical Christian believer and his or her Muslim counterpart can "understand" each other. But this is obviously not the sense of understanding in the present context. Why? Because this kind of being meaningful is equivalent to "not understanding" in a real or more ultimate sense. Shall we say that real understanding comes about when, say, a non-Muslim shares, or identifies himself, however temporarily, with Muslim beliefs? This is what Jane Smith has asked non-Muslims to do.³ Now, although it is a noble ideal to try to see things from another person's point of view, I am afraid that it must be admitted that this is impossible in the final analysis. The reason is that an observer of an experience would have to become the owner or at least the sharer of that experience, and we have already seen that this is not a legitimate demand. Further, an observer does not *need* to have an experience in order to make sense of propositions about it. The search must, therefore, be for some other sense of "understanding" and of "being meaningful to someone." In the case of the study of a religion such as Islam, it seems more appropriate to aspire to "intellectual understanding or appreciation," and it will be shown that this is possible both for Muslims and for non-Muslims to a degree that one can learn from the other.

The first condition for this understanding is that the investigating subject not be inimical to or prejudiced against the object of his or her study, in this case Islam, but rather be open-minded and, if possible, sympathetically attuned. Prejudice is not confined to religious or other emotional conditions. Intellectual prejudice may come in the form of preconceived notions or categories. Scholars trained in certain disciplines are specially liable to this kind of prejudice. Honesty is the sole remedy for this, that is, to admit that one's categories have broken down. Again, some ways of intellectually constructing reality are

such that even when they are grossly inadequate the subject cannot often easily recognize those inadequacies. Historical reductionism is one such method when, for example, a scholar may attempt to "explain" Islam's genesis and even its nature with reference to Jewish, Christian, or other "influences."

Now, what Abdul-Rauf is protesting against is precisely this brzen-faced cultural superiority—whether in the form of religious prejudice, cultural prejudice, or some form of intellectual prejudice. Pre-nineteenth-century Western treatments of Islam suffered from the first while nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship suffered particularly from the last two. And it was this cultural and intellectual superciliousness which the Turkish modernist Namik Kemal bitterly attacked in his *Refutation of Renan* and which in our own day has been dealt with analytically by Edward Said.⁴ I think it is because of this that Wilfred Smith laid down the principle referred to above, namely, that for a statement to be valid about a religion it must be not only acceptable to outside scholars but also true or valid for those inside that religion. On the other hand, as we pointed out earlier, there are many statements made all the time by some insiders that are repudiated by other insiders. Indeed, there are many statements made about Islam by outsiders such as H. A. R. Gibb and Wilfred Smith which are rejected by many Muslims but which are regarded as highly meaningful by many other Muslims. In Chapter 5 of this volume William Roff, referring to Smith, rightly observes that it can be asked "how many—or how few—Muslims may in such circumstances constitute a court" when an outsider seeks insider approval of his or her statements about Islam. The present writer must acknowledge that he has learned a great deal about Islam from the insights of several Western scholars just as he has learned much and gained fundamental insights into Islam from his Muslim teachers, particularly his father. And about some of their own statements concerning Islam, Muslims themselves are sharply divided. What does this mean?

Before going further, let us emphasize that the kind of intellectual understanding being considered—given concern, sympathy, and lack of prejudice—is a sort of scientific knowledge. It is not a religious experience but a quasi-scientific (intellectual) knowledge of a religious experience, where the normativeness or authority of the experience vanishes, but something of its direct effect upon the experiencing subject (including the latter's report of it) can be preserved and made accessible to others. The experience as a living and integral whole,

herefore, cannot be conveyed by a historian or social scientist; such scholars nonetheless can appreciate it intellectually and convey it so that it becomes a part of "scientific knowledge."

An interesting discussion of the insider/outsider question is to be found in Robert Merton's *Sociology of Science*.⁵ Merton studies groups and their group-centered claims and ideologies; his approach is, therefore, that of a structural-ascriptive analyst. Now, groups and their cultures are amenable to this treatment but religious phenomena with universalist truth claims are not. In the present context, therefore, we must distinguish between the religious communities as bearers of religious cultures and the normative truths or transcendent aspects of religions, as in the case of Islam in this volume. Even when a social group claims normative quality for its "truth"—for example, the truth claim of Aryan science versus the falsehood of Jewish science made by the Nazis—this may sound like a religious truth claim, but it is not. That it is not is evidenced by the fact that it is dismissed as false or as dangerously stupid or as amusing—depending on who the respondent is—by all outsiders in a manner in which these latter cannot dismiss a religious claim of universal validity. This may be despite the fact that the group in question (the Nazis in this case) makes its claim with a fervor and sincerity of commitment that is not less than that of any Muslim or other religious person. Muslims do not claim a "Muslim" truth for Islam, but a transcendent, universal truth.

Indeed, that part of Islam which has become the property of Muslims and has become part of the culture of the Muslim community is precisely amenable to the structural-ascriptive analysis Merton is talking about. In this area, the experience of the Muslim community is something unique, non-transferable, and cumulative. It is cumulative because it is inherited and ongoing, and in this sense it cannot be shared by an outsider historian or social scientist; this is what Merton holds when he quotes Claude Lévi-Strauss to the effect that a historian or an ethnographer can generalize an experience *as experience*. I must repeat that an experience as an integral whole cannot be transferred out, through intellectual appreciation of it, the historian or social scientist can convey something of the immediate effect the experience had upon the subject or its significance for the subject. Not only that. When the historian or social scientist generalizes about the experience, he can also illuminate it by making comparisons, contrasts, and analyses in a way the insider cannot, unless the latter becomes a historian or

social scientist. Both the insider and the outsider can learn from one another in this sense.

But surely to Islam there also belongs a transcendent aspect, an aspect which has not yet been appropriated and which is still an open book. The Muslim community may appropriate it in the future and make it part of its cumulative tradition; or anyone else may appropriate it if one cares to. Whether Muslims have an advantage over others because they are already committed to Islam, or others have an advantage over Muslims because the latter are limited by an already solidified tradition is an open and highly interesting question. In any case, however, it is in this respect that a genuine religion differs from group ideologies such as White truth or Black truth, and from the pseudo-religious group claim for such things as Aryan truth and Aryan science.

To return to the question posed above, while it is obviously the Muslims' task to propound Islam, Muslims and non-Muslims can certainly cooperate at the level of intellectual understanding. Such statements as grow out of this cooperation ought to be valid for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Further, in the face of disagreements within Islam, one cannot view this affair only from the perspective of the insider or the outsider. Given honesty, open-mindedness, and fairness of mind on the part of the outsider, the intra-Islamic differences may cut across outsider-insider differences at the intellectual level. The intra-Islamic differences are of various types. We have mentioned earlier that most of these are differences of time and place. There was a time when Sufism was unheard of in Islam. Then there was a time when Sufism arose and was generally opposed by the 'Ulamā'. Then Sufism multiplied into various types and engulfed the entire body-social of Islam. Lastly, we witness a time when the attempt has been to reform and reinterpret Sufism, and it may well be in the process of transformation. Indeed, the differences of opinion within the "orthodox" community are such that no single voice can hope to carry the entire community with it. Then there are differences between regions where forms of Islam are colored by ecological conditions—some local conditions being not antagonistic to Islam while others are incompatible with it.

Although there will always be legitimate differences in interpretation, the spectacularly wild growth of interpretations is surely not all a product of Islam. Social scientists divide Islam into a "great tradition"

and a "little tradition." We have just noted that the great tradition itself is not monolithic—quite apart from Shi'i-Sunni differences. Further, the social scientist regards all manifestations in the name of Islam as genuine and valid manifestations of Islam. For one thing, throughout Islamic history, the "orthodoxification" of the little traditions has been going on, sometimes at a quicker pace than at others, and not the least rapid at the present in certain cases. This suggests that the distinction between great and little traditions is not a divinely ordained imperative. But secondly, and far more importantly, this phenomenon does call for a criterion-referent, that is to say, a normative Islam. Even the social scientists' distinction of a great and little tradition assumes such a normative criterion and cannot simply rest on literate/nonliterate distinctions. Witness the phenomenon of the Muslim philosophers—al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā—whose major theses in the realm of religion were virulently rejected by the Shari'a orthodoxy but who nonetheless cannot be classed as members of a little tradition. This criterion, which must judge between the differences among Muslims and those among Muslims and non-Muslims as to what normative Islam at the intellectual level is, must remain the Qur'an itself and the Prophet's definitive conduct. Among non-Muslims, primary thought is of the Islamicist scholar who deals with the great tradition. As for the social scientist, particularly the anthropologist, he studies the little tradition as an empirical reality without talking about normative Islam. The wish is not to decry the work of those who study actual Muslim societies; on the contrary, their work is not only highly useful but an essential prerequisite even for any would-be Muslim reformer. Criticism is due because when social scientists study "Islam as it is actually lived," they tend to believe and also to induce others to believe that this situation is static and even perhaps "normative for those people."

I think these remarks have relevance to a problem raised by Earle Waugh in the opening lines of his paper in Chapter 3 of this volume on "The Popular Muhammad," where he contends that many devout Muslims refuse to accept outsiders' descriptions of their beliefs. Waugh expounds the idea that treatments of Muhammad should be done "at all levels." As said above, a criterion-referent is needed not only for little traditions but also for the great tradition(s), and indeed equally for outsiders' judgments about Islam; further, this criterion can only be the Qur'an and the Prophet's definitive conduct, for the following reasons. Not only do the people of the great tradition(s) but

also those of the little traditions claim, and claim sincerely, that it is these two sources that constitute the norm of Islam; but the people of the great tradition(s) go further and claim they are trying to follow that norm and that if they consciously or in ignorance deviate from it that would constitute a sin, even a grave sin. Here, too, the two traditions do not actually differ. Indeed, in the great tradition itself there have been elitists and populists. For example, while the Ash'arite theologians asserted that one cannot be a real (as opposed to a nominal) Muslim unless one rationally understands the basis of Islam, particularly monotheism, their contemporaries, the Maturidi theologians in Central Asia, were saying that the actual Islam of the common Turks was good Islam whether the Turks had any rational knowledge of their religion or not.

Generally modern scholars (social scientists in particular) believe that normative Islam is the Shari'a. There is no doubt, however, that the Shari'a has only a derivative status—both in concept and content—since it is the historical product of lawyer-theologians. It is purportedly deduced from the Qur'an and Sunna. Indeed, some scholars even hold the normative to be that which Muslims or some learned Muslims believe to be "correct Islam." Now a Muslim, of course, may well say that what he believes is what he thinks to be correct or even true Islam, but he will never claim it is normative Islam for he will readily admit that what he considers true or correct Islam is to be judged (solely) by the Qur'an and Sunna. This normative anchoring point, namely, the Qur'an and Sunna, must modify the phenomenological approach which otherwise tends to be incurably relativistic. We are often invited to accept scholarship which is very tight and neat (even dogmatic) so far as its methods and categories go, but which indulges in a free-for-all Islam at the same time. I think these remarks should clarify my position *vis à vis* say, those of Richard C. Martin as found in chapter one above.

To sum up the main points I have attempted to make so far, an intellectual understanding and appreciation of Islam is quite possible for a non-Muslim who is unprejudiced, sensitive, and knowledgeable; I would say such understanding is as possible for a non-Muslim as for a Muslim. Abdul-Rauf's remarks are effective only against those non-Muslims who lack these conditions. I think that Wilfred Smith's principle of verifying interpretations of Islam with Muslims is also intended as a safeguard against failures to meet any of these conditions and also perhaps as a sort of additional verification. I find historical reduc-

ionism to be a result of the failure to meet these conditions. I welcome the phenomenological approach with the provision that its users recognize the Qur'ān and Sunna as normative criterion-referents for all expressions and understandings of Islam. In the introduction to his author's book, *Islam and Modernity*,⁶ an effort is made to enunciate a satisfactory hermeneutical method for the Qur'ān.

Historical Versus Literary Criticism

It is with this background that I take notice of Andrew Rippin's paper in Chapter 9 of this volume dealing with the exposition and justification of John Wansbrough's methodologies as expounded in the latter's *Quranic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu*.⁷ Rippin's paper and the documents on which it is based are undoubtedly among the kinds of works against which Abdul-Rauf protests in his paper. The strategy adopted by those who uphold Wansbrough's methods is, in effect, to negate history and then apply what they call the "literary method." Rippin begins by observing that it is a commonly accepted notion that Judaism and Islam are religions "in history." Now, unless the phrase "in history" has some mystical meaning, *all* religions are in history. It has, of course, been commonly held that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are historical religions because in the view of these religions God intervened in history in order to fulfill purposes. It is obvious that such statements are not historical in the sense that they can be proved or disproved through historical inquiry. What historical inquiry can prove or disprove is whether or not these religions, in fact, have made such claims and at what point in time. Rippin, who does draw similar distinctions, nevertheless seems to confuse these two issues, namely, a religious view of history and a historical view of religion. This is the reason why, after rejecting the claims of these religions, he goes on to reject the historical inquiry into "what really happened." For whether or not one agrees with the claims of these religions, the fact that these religions make such claims can and should be historically investigated. We want to know, for example, when these claims were made, who made them, and so on. How can the rejection of a theology of history obviate the necessity of a history of that theology?

Also, why have these three religions been called historical and not, say, Hinduism and ancient Greek religion? This question is particularly relevant since Rippin goes on to try to prove his thesis of the non-

historicity of Islam by asserting that no extra-literary corroboration in terms of archaeological data are available for Islam; were this all there was to say, he should accept Hinduism and Buddhism as historical religions, because a great deal of such data is available in their cases. Again, there is confusion between two very different types of questions, the theological and the historical. And so, we are told that in order to cure this theological problem of the origins of Islam, Wansbrough embarked upon a new method. This method is not a new historical approach, for a historical approach cannot get rid of the theological problem (we wonder why); instead, one must turn to the approach of literary analysis, to which we now turn.

Rippin says that this "classic insight" into the early Islamic sources is not new but that Goldziher and Schacht had pioneered this approach in connection with their critiques of Hadith. What our author does not see, however, is that Goldziher and Schacht had primarily relied on a historical method to show that certain Hadiths had, in fact, originated after certain other Hadiths. They did not rely on literary analyses like Wansbrough's. Indeed, this author has done historical criticism of many of the "fundamental Hadith" in *Islamic Methodology of History*.⁸ It would seem that the efficacy of the historical method is proof enough that Muslim historical materials are basically genuine and do not need recourse to a purely literary-analytical method. Neither is it clear by what logic Rippin adduces the historical method of Goldziher and Schacht to support Wansbrough's methods of literary analysis, for, as will be shown, the latter are so inherently arbitrary that they sink into the marsh of utter subjectivity.

The greatest consequence of giving up on history so easily is that the upholders of the literary method cannot seem to make sense of the Qur'ān. Wansbrough would have us accept his notion of different (Judaic) background traditions rather than chronological Meccan and Medinan periods to explain certain differences within the Qur'ān. This is not the place to go into details,⁹ but just consider the following. The Qur'ān, in narrating the story of Abraham's dispute with his father, says (19:47, Meccan) that Abraham, while parting company with his father, told him he would continue to pray for his forgiveness. In Medina, however, when it became imperative to wean off the Muslim immigrants from members of their close relatives in Mecca who were still pagans and were engaged in active hostilities against Muslims, the Qur'ān tells them (9:114) "Abraham prayed for his father's forgiveness only because he had made a promise" (i.e., other-

ise he had completely cut off all relationship with him). Now, my point is that each of these passages fits exactly into the Prophet's historical circumstances respectively in Mecca and Medina. There may be one, two, or a thousand traditions—they are all related in the Qur'an to Muhammad's situation. Again, compare Qur'an 11:27–29 where the prophet Noah is asked by "big ones" among his people to give up his low-class followers before they will join him—which was Muhammad's own situation in his later years in Mecca (cf. 6:52ff.). Or see Qur'an 11:84 and 7:85 where the prophet Shu'ayb is represented as admonishing his people to desist from committing fraud in commerce, which was again, of course, a problem in Muhammad's society. What else can these and innumerable other examples lead us to conclude except that the Qur'an is intimately related to the Prophet's activity?

Having unanchored the Qur'an from its historical moorings in the Prophet's life, one basic task of Wansbrough and Rippin is to anchor it historically elsewhere. For, as we have already seen above, the necessity of historical relocation cannot be obviated by a simple rejection of the historicity of the early sources themselves. We must know where the Qur'an belongs and to which person or groups. It appears, however, that the whole idea of rejecting traditional history without further ado was to divest oneself at a single stroke of all historical responsibility. Rippin tells us in his essay (in a slightly different context which applies *a fortiori* to the Qur'an, however): "But we do *not* know and can probably never know what really happened; all we can know is what other people *believed* happened. . . ."

Coming now to the content of the principle of literary analysis, four themes are put before us as especially characteristic of Jewish prophetic literature which must illustrate the salient characteristics of the Qur'an as well, namely, retribution, sign, exile, and covenant. The most fundamental question to be asked here is: On what basis has Wansbrough selected these four topics as being of salient importance to the Qur'an? Why is there no talk, say, of socio-economic justice or had as major themes of the Qur'an? Neither the Muslims (who, according to Wansbrough, eventually formed the Qur'an out of the diverse Judeo-Christian traditions) nor yet the Western tradition of Islamic scholarship (which Wansbrough accuses of having succumbed to the claims of the Muslim tradition) regard Wansbrough's four themes as the most prominent ones in the Qur'an. If the Qur'an was the result

of a conspiracy which Wansbrough now claims to have unearthed, then at the very least he should clarify why these four themes—so prominent in his analysis—did not gain prominence in Islam. If Muslims are asked about the most salient teachings of the Qur'an, I suggest that most replies will include monotheism, prayers, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage. Wansbrough's thesis, then, requires more than one conspiracy: One to hide the very origins of the Qur'an and to attribute it to a prophetic revelation, and a second (not necessarily inconsistent with the first) to underplay the importance of Wansbrough's four themes (the real themes of the first conspiracy) and to replace them with what Muslims regard as the "Pillars of Islam."

It was on some of these methodological grounds that I criticized Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* in the introduction to *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, to which Rippin replies toward the end of his paper. He suggests that my criticism of Wansbrough boils down to the fact that I simply regard my method to be better than his. The fact is, however, that I have advanced, both here and elsewhere (see note 9), several basic considerations to show that my method makes sense of the Qur'an—as a body of doctrine that is coherent in itself and that fits into the life of the Prophet. Wansbrough's method makes nonsense of the Qur'an, and he washes his hands of the responsibility of explaining how that "nonsense" came about.¹⁰

As for Rippin's complaint that several scholars have emphasized the Arab background of Islam at the expense of the Jewish or Judeo-Christian, it appears to me that Wansbrough has gone beyond any reasonable limits in making the Qur'an a completely Judeo-Christian sectarian manifestation. The facts are that in Arabia itself Judeo-Christian ideas were fairly widespread. The Qur'an affirms that there had been attempts to proselytize the Meccans but that these had been unsuccessful. The Meccans and the Arabs, however (and not just the Prophet as is commonly believed), had come to know a fair amount of the biblical tradition. Thus, a great deal of this tradition had already been Arabized; witness the prophetology which, along with the biblical personages, included certain Arab prophets—and the tradition that the Ka'ba had been built by Abraham and Ishmael. Now, the starting point of the Qur'anic teaching was not biblical controversies but existential problems within Meccan society itself. During its course, no doubt, the Qur'an picked up a great amount of Judeo-Christian tradition. To insist, however, that the Qur'an is purely or

even basically a result of that tradition is a manifest travesty of truth, for basically the Qur'ān remains Arab to the core.

Although it has not been possible for me to discuss every contribution to this volume, I believe the problem I have elaborated—the insider/outsider dilemma—points to the complexity of the historical/comparative study of religion, in particular Islam. In his comprehensive introduction, Richard C. Martin has given an overview of the study of Islam as it has developed in the West, underlining in particular two different approaches, the “classical” orientalist and the newer social scientific, thus suggesting the need to bridge and combine the two with history of religions. Western orientalist scholarship had, of course, itself started to develop a certain self-critique at the hands of certain scholars, including Jacques Waardenburg.¹¹ One hopes that after a *bouleversant* (though rather sweeping) work like Edward Said's *Orientalism*,¹² healthier, richer, and more synthetic studies of Islam may gradually emerge. Islam is an area of study which has been notoriously neglected by historians of religions, perhaps because it has not been amenable to their pet categories and methodologies. The Arizona State University symposium on “Islam and the History of Religions” from which this volume has resulted has proved to be a unique forum for the underlining of problems and opportunities. It is important now to apply and test many different ideas, approaches, and methods and, indeed, to demonstrate that Islam is a very complex and rich phenomenon. The study of Islam is a challenge to the human mind—a challenge as rewarding as it is difficult. It is certain that Islam in history has changed and that it will continue to change at an even more rapid pace. This change appears to have a double dimension: The changing of “little” traditions in relation to the “greater” ones, which can be characterized as the “orthodoxification” of the tradition, and secondly, the modernization of the great tradition. Yet, basically, Islam will remain the same.

What the present volume highlights is the need for an interdisciplinary approach, not just in terms of the “orientalist” and “social scientist” of whom I have spoken above, but in terms of several disciplines with defined methods of research. For the former without the latter remain myopic, resulting in dangerous generalizations, while the latter without the former become abstract, in fact, chimerical.

Part Six

Reference Material