

SAMUEL ZWEMER'S MISSIONARY STRATEGY TOWARDS ISLAM

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Abstract

Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952), known as ‘Apostle to Islam’, was an influential figure in Christian mission to Muslims. He influenced subsequent generation of missionaries to the Muslim world. This thesis will look at his view of Muhammad, the Quran and Islamic reformers. He believed that moving away from Islam implied progress and moving toward Islam equated regress. He used two Muslim reformers; ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Ahmed Khan to argue his point. Zwemer viewed Khan’s engagement with the Christian scripture as a positive case when Muslims would give importance to the Christian scripture. In turn he believed that al-Wahhab’s notion of returning to the Quran and example of Muhammad would have negative outcome for the Muslim world.

Contrary to the dominant paradigm of his time that radical Islam was in a dying phase, Zwemer warned the church of the lingering danger of fundamentalist Islam. By exposing readers in his writings to the possible sources of the Quran (e.g. collections of rabbinic Judaism, heretical Christian) and by questioning the prophethood of Muhammad, Zwemer contested the divine origins of Islam. He viewed Islam as a challenge and suggested framework for effective Muslim evangelism. Zwemer’s work is still relevant today for Muslims because it may encourage them to be more self-reflective, and for Christians because they may consider Zwemer’s approach and arguments.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Major Protestant Missionaries to Muslims in the Nineteenth Century	11
2.1. <i>Introduction</i>	<i>11</i>
2.2. <i>Protestant Mission to Muslim</i>	<i>11</i>
2.2.1 Henry Martyn	12
2.2.2. Karl G. Pfander.....	13
2.2.3. William Muir	14
2.2.4. Thomas Valpy French	15
2.4. <i>Revival of World Mission.....</i>	<i>16</i>
2.5. <i>Deferent Methods for an effective Mission to Muslims</i>	<i>18</i>
2.5.1. Islamic Study	20
2.5.2. Humanitarian Work	21
2.5.3. Missionary Cooperation	22
2.5.4. Evangelism Through The Oriental Churches	23
2.5.5. Confrontational Approach	24
2.6. <i>Conclusion</i>	<i>27</i>
3. Intellectual Biography of Zwemer	28
3.1. <i>Introduction</i>	<i>30</i>
3.2. <i>Overview of Zwemer's Life.....</i>	<i>30</i>
3.3. <i>Mission to Muslims</i>	<i>33</i>
3.3.1. Arabian Mission	34
3.3.2. Bookshop in Arabia.....	36
3.4. <i>The Role of Evangelism in Mission</i>	<i>37</i>
3.4.1. Christian Ecumenism.....	39
3.4.2. Missionary Conferences	40
3.5. <i>Zwemer's Writings.....</i>	<i>41</i>
3.5.1. Moslem World.....	44
3.5.2. View of Islam	45
3.6. <i>Conclusion</i>	<i>46</i>
4. Zwemer's Originality with Muhammad	48
4.1. <i>Introduction</i>	<i>48</i>

4.2. <i>Zwemer's View of Muhammad</i>	48
4.4 <i>Zwemer's Evaluation of Muhammad</i>	51
4.4.1. Muhammad Examined Through Three Criteria.....	51
4.4.2. Muhammad Compared with Christ	61
4.4.3. Violence in Muhammad's Life	67
4.6. <i>Conclusion</i>	71
5. Zwemer's Attitude to and Evaluation of the Quran	73
5.1. <i>Introduction</i>	74
5.2. <i>Translation of the Quran</i>	74
5.3. <i>Style of the Quran</i>	78
5.4. <i>Content of the Quran</i>	80
5.5. <i>Quran against progress</i>	82
5.6. <i>Quranic witness to Christian Scripture</i>	85
5.7. <i>Sources of the Quran</i>	90
5.8. <i>Conclusion</i>	96
6. Zwemer's Assessment of Islamic Reformers	99
6.1. <i>Introduction</i>	99
6.2. <i>Moving away from Muhammad and the Quran</i>	99
6.2.1. Moving toward Christ.....	102
6.3. <i>Muslim reformers in line with Christian reformers</i>	103
6.3.1. Ahmed Khan.....	105
6.4. <i>Zwemer and Fundamentalist Reformers</i>	109
6.4.1. Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab.....	110
6.5. <i>Conclusion</i>	116
7. Conclusion.....	117
Bibliography.....	126

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to look at Samuel Zwemer's missionary strategy towards Islam by examining his outlook on Muhammad, the Quran and his assessments of reformations in the Muslim world. For the protestant missionary establishment his groundbreaking work in the Muslim world gave him the title of 'Apostle to Islam'.¹ However, some Muslim academics would label him 'imperialist' for the same efforts.²

Zwemer's contribution to the relevant topic of Christian study of Islam has not been given the attention it deserves.³ It is for such a reason this research would aim to analyse and to understand Zwemer's view of Islam. The first landmark research undertaken on Zwemer was right after his death in 1952 by J. Christy Wilson entitled *Apostle to Islam*. Wilson's work has been useful in clarifying the chronological order of Zwemer's life and ministry. Abdullah O. Al-Abdulkareem *Images of Islam in Samuel M. Zwemer's The Moslem World Quarterly, 1911-1947*, (2001) looks at the direction the *Moslem World* went under the editorship of Zwemer, and we will be looking at such work when needed. Another in-depth study we will be referring to is by Peter Ipema *The Islam Interpretations of Duncan B. Macdonald, Samuel M. Zwemer, A. Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred C. Smith* (1971). A shorter article by John Hubers, 'Samuel Zwemer and the challenge of Islam: From Polemic to a Hint of Dialogue' (2004) as the title suggest that Zwemer made some changes with his view of Islam and we will be examining the merit of his argument.

Zwemer's scholarly and missiological venture makes him an ideal candidate and a window through which we can have a greater understanding of evangelical engagement with Islam. Therefore, it is important to undertake further research on Zwemer's view of Islam, especially as he has influenced Westerners generally and Protestants particularly view Islam. Moreover, examinations of Zwemer's thought 'preserve the best of

¹ Wilson, 'The Apostle to Islam: The Legacy of Samuel Zwemer', 163-68.

² Siddiqui, "Islam and Christian Theology", 670-71.

³ Kidd, *American Christian and Islam*, 58.

nineteenth century effort and yet portray the positive elements of the twentieth century evangelical understanding of evangelism, [and] the relation of Christianity with Islam.’⁴

Zwemer has wrestled with the question of the role of Muhammad in salvation history, the divine origin of the Quran and the much important question of Muslim reformers. It is likely that some would experience Zwemer’s subsequent influence on the western outlook of Islam but not be familiar with Zwemer himself. The journal *Muslim World* is a case in point: while many would be aware of such journal, not as many people would be aware that it finds its genesis with Zwemer.

We will be examining what motivated Zwemer to study Islam and to become a missionary in the Muslim world at a time when the Islamic world was viewed as the most difficult field in undertaking missionary work.⁵ We will also examine his contribution to the shaping of the missionary debate in the 1930s. His study of Islam brings to our attention the challenging nature of such an undertaking. As we will discover Zwemer emphasised the challenges that the Islamic sanction of death to an apostate brought to Christian mission among Muslims.

Zwemer believed engagement with the topic of Muhammad’s prophethood and the divine origin of the Quran was unavoidable in a Christian missionary strategy towards Islam. However, Christians have avoided such topics in their discussion with Muslims due to the sensitive nature for its followers.⁶ Andrew Rippin, a leading Islamic scholar, points us to the exalted role that Muhammad plays in Islam since ““attacking” Muhammad is, of course, attacking the way of the life of individual Muslims.”⁷ Salman Rushie’s book *The Satanic Verse* (1988) – a novel perceived to critique Muhammad – resulted in the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, calling for the death of the author. However, the response to Zwemer would be different, since he wrote primarily to a

⁴ Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 187.

⁵ Addison, *The Christian Approach*, 310.

⁶ Mohammed, *Muslim-Christian Relation, Past, Present, Future*, 62.

⁷ Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 50.

Christian audience and in a pre-Internet age, where the availability of information was less available.

The 18th and 19th century European expansion in the Muslim world, Africa and Asia gave Christian mission a greater possibility. This was the time of unprecedented ‘expansion of Christianity [around the world] on a scale not seen since apostolic times’.⁸ Nevertheless, Zwemer believed that the preaching of Christianity is self sufficient in seeing advancement in the Muslim world. Contrary to the claim that the colonial expansion of western power in the Muslim world was indistinguishable from the advancement of Christianity, Zwemer would argue otherwise by asserting that ‘we must not put our trust in politics.’⁹

Zwemer would discover that there had not been significant works written by Protestants on Islam which, in turn, prompted him to fill the gap in such important venture. He emphasised that Islam needs to be studied by having a one on one engagement with Muslims and by reading of current scholarship on the religion. This is contrary to the assertion of some that it is ‘better to go to the mosque than to reach for the dictionary [to understand Islam]’.¹⁰ For such a reason, Zwemer would attempt to present an scholarly Islam and Islam seen by its followers, as opposed to a Christianized or distorted image of Islam. Yet, it is clear that his writing on Islam was from the perspective of an outsider and he would address questions considered highly sensitive in Islam.

Zwemer has undertaken anthropological and linguistic study of the Muslim world; yet his overarching concern was missiological in nature. His life motto was ‘The Evangelization of the Moslem world in this Generation’¹¹. To that end, Zwemer’s effort focused on a mission to Muslims through the preaching of Christianity and motivating others to take part in such an effort. Through his writing and public speaking he introduced Islam and the need for mission by tailoring his message depending on his audience. He did that

⁸ Jamieson, *Faith and Sword: A Short History of Christian-Muslim Conflict*, 136.

⁹ Zwemer, *Call to Prayer*, 27.

¹⁰ Cragg, *House of Islam*, 5.

¹¹ Zwemer, *Call to Prayer*, 24.

because he saw significant distinction between Christianity and Islam. For example, the eternal Son of God becoming flesh was foundational to the Christian confession (John 3:16), the very notion denied in the Quran (112:3).

As a research methodology we will use archival strategy through literary criticism and content analysis of Zwemer's work as primary sources. Some of Zwemer's works are still in print today, and most of his writing is assessable on the Internet. Zwemer has written over fifty books and this study will focus on Zwemer's published work – we will examine the nature and extent of some of his writing in section 3.5. This study will be using five of his major work and one work he co-authored. They are; *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam* (1900) the first major work he has written and it had four editions. *Islam, A Challenge to Faith* (1907); *The Disintegration of Islam* (1916); *Mohammed or Christ* (1915); *The Cross Above the Crescent* (1941) and a book written with his missionary partner for over fifty years James Cantine *The Golden Milestone* (1939). It is worth nothing that, Zwemer's writing is repetitive. Hence, in the works just mentioned, we have an adequate representation of Zwemer's view of Islam. Moreover, we will be examining whether we find a shift in Zwemer's writing by forming a contrast between his earlier and later works.

Extensive coverage of Zwemer's view of Islam is beyond the scope of this research. For Zwemer the Quran, Muhammad and the Islamic reformation was of immense importance. He even cited the much-repeated quote by William Muir when addressing potential missionary to the Muslim world at the Student Volunteer Convention in Tennessee: 'The Sword of Mohammed and the Koran are the most stubborn enemies of civilization, liberty, and truth which the world has yet known'.¹²

¹² Wilson, *Apostle To Islam*, 169.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter two, *Major Protestant Missionaries to Muslims in the Nineteenth Century* forms the background picture of Zwemer and his work. We will be looking in depth at those who have influenced Zwemer. We will also explore the different strategy used to getting converts, ranging from scholarly study of Islam to confrontational approach in studying this religion.

Chapter three, *Intellectual Biography of Zwemer* presents an overview of his life. We will examine Zwemer's perception of mission and his efforts in seeing it come to pass, including his drive to start a mission in Arabia and the methodology he implemented. Zwemer envisioned greater cooperation among the Christian denominations for an effective mission to Muslims. This will be followed by Zwemer's activity in missionary conferences and his role in bringing the topic of Mission to Muslims to the forefront and the social challenge Islam brings to Mission.

Chapter four, *Zwemer's Originality with Muhammad* explains the different criteria that Zwemer uses to examine Muhammad, how much his view of Muhammad diverged or agreed with his contemporaries and whether his view has developed. At the same time, we will look at Zwemer's originality in the study of Muhammad and whether he would consider Muhammad a prophet with a divine encounter.

Chapter five, *Zwemer's Attitude to and Evaluation of the Quran*, explores his perception of style, content and sources of the Quran. Moreover, we will be examining where Zwemer could be located on the spectrum of Christian perception of the book of Islam in his missionary strategy, whether he viewed the Quran as a tool for evangelism towards Muslims or simply of 'demonic' origin. Since Zwemer did not believe in the divine origin of the Quran, we will examine his view on the use of the Quran in missionary strategising. We will also address the important question of the role the Quran has played in the advancement of civilization.

Chapter six, *Zwemer's Assessment of Islamic Reformers*, presents the individuals that Zwemer viewed as inspirational as well as problematic in the effort of bringing transformation in the Muslim World. Namely, Ahmed Khan's effort of taking Islam on a progressive line and Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab's return to the fundamentals of Islam. We will examine his assessment of Muhammad and the Quran's influence on the Islamic world as well as the solution he proposes to the backwardness he encountered.

Chapter seven, concludes our study by bringing together our findings.

2. Major Protestant Missionaries to Muslims in the Nineteenth Century

2.1. Introduction

As a means of comprehending Zwemer's outlook towards Muslims and the Muslim world it is important to reflect on those who were precursors to him. After briefly looking at such individuals we will look at the context of the protestant missionary outreach by exploring the great awakening in world evangelism. From here we will explore 19th-century missions to Muslims, by looking at the different methodology used for accomplishment of such a goal: scholarly study of Islam, humanitarian work, missionary cooperation, evangelism through the oriental churches and, finally, we will explore the confrontational approach that has developed in the engagement with Islam primarily with evangelically-minded individuals.

2.2. Protestant Mission to Muslim

The history of Protestant mission to the Islamic world was not on a grand scale as were missions to other parts of the world. While looking at the 19th century we discover that Henry Martyn, Karl G. Pfander, William Muir and Thomas Valpy were pioneers in the Protestant missionary endeavour or supporters of missions to Muslims. These, in turn, were possibly influential on Zwemer and, as such, we will look briefly at these lives. But firstly, we will explore Raymond Lull who could be considered a distant influence on Zwemer. Lull was a missionary to Muslims in Tunis in the 14th century and was one who wanted to impact the Muslim world by seeing great conversion to Christianity. Alan Neely affirms that Lull's missionary zeal and passion to see Muslims evangelized impacted Zwemer a great deal to the point that he wrote *Raymond Lull: First Missionary to the Moslems* in 1902.¹³ However, Zwemer's work on Lull does not necessarily equal influence but rather such work was probably written due to the same conviction of mission to Muslims that Zwemer found in Lull. He perceives Lull as a proto-protestant,

¹³While Neely views this work as enlightening, he found it to fall short of being an accurate account of Lull's biography. Neely, 'Lull, Raymund', 415.

the ‘first Christian missionary to Mohammedans’ and the forerunner to the great missionary movement which was to follow.¹⁴ He added that, had the church throughout the centuries taken Lull’s instruction to be active in evangelism, Christianity would have penetrated the Islamic world to a greater degree.¹⁵ Lull’s zeal for mission can be noticed on Zwemer, to the point that Sherwood Eddy states that ‘Zwemer was the Protestant Raymond Lull of the nineteenth century, trying to arouse the Christian world for a united mission to Moslems.’¹⁶ In this regard, while looking at church history, Zwemer esteemed those who engaged with Muslims through their ‘pen’, such as John of Damascus and Petrus Venerabilis, while he showed more admiration to those, such as Lull, who took the next step in attempting missionary work among Muslims.¹⁷ While parallelism could be discerned between Zwemer and Lull it is not surprising to find divergences in their theological formation. But, rather, the strongest influence we discern could possibly be with Protestant Missionaries of the 19th century.

2.2.1 Henry Martyn

Henry Martyn (1781-1821) was born in Cornwall (England) and studied at Cambridge where he gained the first Smith’s prizeman, the highest award given by the university, in 1801. While the *Church Missionary Society* would not label him as a missionary he has been praised as ‘one of the greatest of missionaries.’¹⁸ With the exception of Lull, Zwemer affirmed that it is with Martyn that we find effective witness to Muslims.¹⁹ While Zwemer came to such a conclusion, generally speaking Martyn was unfruitful in regard to the numbers of people that were converted due to his ministry in comparison to other missionaries in the non-Islamic world. For Lyle Werff Martyn is significant in the Christian approach to Muslims for the reason that he is among the earliest protestants whose prime engagement was with Muslims.²⁰ While George Smith would affirm that William Carey could be seen as the pioneer of present day mission it is with Martyn that

¹⁴ *Raymond Lull: First Missionary to the Moslems*, 73.

¹⁵ Zwemer, *Islam, A Challenge to Faith*, 185.

¹⁶ Eddy, *Pathfinders of the World Missionary Crusade*, 240.

¹⁷ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge To Faith*, 191.

¹⁸ Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, 82. Bennett, ‘The Legacy of Henry Martyn’, 10.

¹⁹ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 185.

²⁰ Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 31.

we can trace the genesis of protestant missionary outreach to Muslims.²¹ Yet, Martyn's influence on consecutive generations of missionaries should not be judged by his short-lived life. Given this, Martyn's ground-breaking endeavour would be a great foundation for Zwemer's exploration of unevangelised Islamic lands and writings on Islam. It was while undertaking outreach to Muslims in India that Martyn translated scripture into local languages as a means of reaching Muslims.²² His tracts were revised and published by Samuel Lee entitled *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism* (1824). In addition, Martyn was clear in the difficult nature of his missionary effort, of which he asserted '[e]ven if I never should see a native converted, God may design by my patience and continuance in the word to encourage future missionaries.'²³ Martyn's theological engagement with Muslims in India has been the foundation for greater Christian-Muslim relation in later generations and has opened the door for effective mission to the Muslim world. In the succeeding chapters we will see to what degree Martyn's view of Islam was influential on Zwemer, while exploring the extent to which Zwemer builds on such a legacy.

2.2.2. Karl G. Pfander

Karl G. Pfander (1803-1865) was a German missionary to the Muslim world who was part of the Basil mission. Pfander wrote, along with *Miftah-ul-Asrar* (Key of Mysteries) and *Tariq-ul-Hydt* (Way of Salvation), his *magnum opus* entitled *Mizan- ul- Haqq* (The Balance of Truth). It was published in German and subsequently translated into oriental languages while undergoing significant revision. The book originated in the light of inadequate literature focusing on outreach to Muslims and consequently Pfander had rewritten the work in view of fresh research by European and Muslim scholars.²⁴ His tracts were not just a simple translation but an effective contextualized and logical presentation of the gospel message into local languages. This was true to the point that Pfander's work was praised by Muslim leaders to be an unseen standard of western

²¹ Smith, *Henry Martyn, Saint and Scholar*.

²² Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 6. Bennett, 'Martyn, Henry', 438.

²³ Cited in Zwemer, *Islam*, 197.

²⁴ Kerr, 'Pfander, Karl Gottlieb', 532.

writing in oriental languages.²⁵ Given that its approach in dealing with Islamic theology was confrontational, it most probably would have given Muslims a cause for concern. Moreover, such work was part of life-long commitment of mission to Muslims and study of Islam. Pfander's work had a circulation of more than thirty thousand copies, which led to the conversion of prominent Muslims. Likewise, one of the means by which Zwemer engaged with Muslims was by producing literature and distribution of tracts. Pfander's influence of later missions could be reflected in the importance given him by T.V. French when he asserted that he 'far out-topped all the missionaries of his day as the Christian champion against Islam.'²⁶ Meanwhile, Sir William Muir said of him that he was 'the most distinguished Christian opponent of Islam that has yet appeared.'²⁷ With such appraisal we can discern the underlying tone in which Islam was encountered. That is to say, not as a dialogue partner in the search of the truth but rather as a hindrance to the gospel and missionary efforts.

2.2.3. William Muir

Sir William Muir (1819-1905) was born in Scotland and was a civil servant in India while it was under the control of the British. In training to be a civil servant he studied the Arabic language and embarked on Islamic studies. Muir attained new level of scholarship on Islam, not matched by his predecessors; through his in-depth study of jurisprudence and his emphasised use of earlier sources in reconstruction of an historical biographical work on Muhammad. This in turn would encourage further studies on the Islamic prophet by western writers, including missionaries.²⁸ Zwemer viewed Muir's work to be one that affectively challenged Islam and brought answers to Islamic objections to the faith.²⁹ Unlike Zwemer, Muir was not a missionary in the classical sense, yet he was an advocate for apologetical works and a strong supporter of Mission.³⁰ Albert Hourani views Muir's ground-breaking work *The Life of Mahomet and History of*

²⁵ Muir, *Muhammedan Controversy*, 31. While Daniel considered Pfander's work to be unintellectual, Werff on the other hand affirmed that his apologetical work has not been matched in its 'strenuous rational procedure.' Daniel, *Islam Europe and Empire*, 255-56. Werff, *The Christian Mission to Muslims* 44.

²⁶ Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, Vol 1, 70-1.

²⁷ Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, Vol 1, 70.

²⁸ Guenther, *The Image of the Prophet*, 44. Bennett, *Victorian*, 103, 112-13.

²⁹ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 386.

³⁰ Bennett, *Victorian*, 103.

Islam to The Era of the Hegira, 4 vols (1858-1862) as not having been surpassed.³¹ While W. M. Watt viewed the work to follow ‘in detail the standard Muslim accounts, though not uncritically.’³² Zwemer cited Muir extensively, especially in his earlier works, as exemplified in *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (1907). We can observe differences between Muir and Zwemer’s approaches to the study of Islam, given that the former work was mainly in the study of early Islam while the latter was focused primarily on contemporary Islam, as we will see in section 3.5.

2.2.4. Thomas Valpy French

Thomas Valpy French (1825-1891) was born in England and was educated in Oxford and then in Rugby; he became a missionary in India under the Church Missionary Society. Known as the ‘seven tongued evangelist’ he undertook missionary work through the establishment of educational institutions and the personal evangelism of Muslims.³³ While in Arabia, French would see fit to spend his time with the local inhabitants as opposed to the comforts of staying with the English authorities.³⁴ Such encounters of French’s sincere love for the Muslims in his willingness to be among them and share the gospel in a contextualized way was one that further awakened Zwemer’s missionary zeal to the Muslim world.³⁵ Zwemer would be one of the new generations of missionaries to be influenced by French. Nearing the end of his life the bishop would speak to Zwemer figuratively, as the book of Deuteronomy portrays Moses’ instruction to Joshua, by stating: ‘I am an old man, and it may be God's will that I can only view the promised land, while it is for you to enter in.’³⁶ Zwemer saw French’s life as foundational for consecutive missions to Muslims and his death in Arabia was not without its

³¹ Hourani, *Europe and The Middle East*, 33.

³² Sir Ahmed Khan, an Islamic reformer and Modernist and a contemporary of Muir, was greatly distressed by this work. Khan believed that *The Life of Mahomet* would hit at the foundations of Islam since it would bring ‘doubt’ to educated Muslims. Guenther, ‘The Image of the Prophet’. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statement*, 244.

³³ Kerr, ‘French, Thomas Valpy’, 227.

³⁴ Zwemer, *Golden Milestone*, 41-2.

³⁵ Zwemer, *Golden Milestone*, 48-9.

³⁶ Cantine, *Golden Milestone*, 39-40.

French mentions his account of meeting Zwemer on the boat in a correspondence letter. Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, Vol 2, 350.

significance.³⁷ With French it is possible to notice a distinction from the earlier century of an imperialistic perception of mission which equated the effort of civilizing with the missionary effort to preaching the gospel in an incarnational missionary effort. Moreover, in doing Mission to Arabia we find a legacy developing where French saw himself as following in the footprints and leading of Martyn;³⁸ as we will see in the following chapter Zwemer's work in Arabia was probably built on such foundations.

2.4. Revival of World Mission

The preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield in England and Jonathan Edwards in America in the eighteenth century played an important part in the awakening of evangelistic zeal in the next century; here, the pivotal importance of taking the gospel to all the world would be underlined.³⁹ Such vision would be manifested in the contexts of the great protestant missionaries: Joshua Marshman, William Carey and William Ward. The Serampore Trio aimed at seeing *The Great Commission* come to pass generally in the non-Christian world, more so Carey who was instrumental in the formation of the present era of missionary work in world mission.⁴⁰ While Zwemer inherited such a legacy his efforts would be directed towards outreach to Muslims. That is, he hoped to see the fulfilment of *the Great Commission* in the most difficult mission field – the Muslim World. In the light of protestant endeavour in world evangelism, commonly known as the 'great century' of Christian mission, he found it lacking in outreach among Muslims. While the Muslim world represented a significant part of the non-Christian world, missionary efforts were lacking as is made apparent in the numbers of missionaries to the Muslims being a fraction of the 27,000 sent to the rest of the mission field.⁴¹

³⁷ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 381. *Islam: A Challenge To Faith*, 262. *Golden Milestone*, 98.

³⁸ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 351.

³⁹ Hogg, 'The Rise of The Protestant Missionary concern, 1517-1914', 105-6. It is important to point out that religious awakening was not limited to Christianity but in different ways included Islam. Not surprisingly such an encounter between both communities of Faith in the 19th century would result in a polemical engagement. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 1. Neill, *A History of Christian Mission*, 310

⁴⁰ William Carry's work *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, (1791) was followed with the establishment of the English Baptist Missionary Society which brought forth the 'modern missionary movement'. Hogg, 'The Rise of The Protestant Missionary concern, 1517-1914', 106. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 3.

⁴¹ Addison, *The Christian Approach*, 310. While Churches were founded in Aden by the British in 1864, evangelism of the locals was not carried out in Arabia. Hunter, *The British Settlement of Aden*, 147.

Moreover, an important influence on Zwemer's endeavour towards the mission field was due to his encounter of the *Student Volunteer Movement* while at college. Such a movement finds its genesis in the *Student Volunteer Conference* which was a gathering of students from different colleges, held in Mount Herman (1886), to take part in intensive training by key preachers, including the great Baptist minister Dwight L. Moody. Such a gathering concluded with 100 volunteers, John R. Mott included, who were willing to become volunteers affirming: 'We are willing and desirous, God permitting, to become foreign missionaries.'⁴² Mott in turn was a Key figure in the drive for recruiting missionaries for foreign lands in America; he recruited many young volunteers in college and university compounds. As we will see in section 3.3.1, Zwemer was one of them.⁴³ By awakening volunteers to undertake missionary work the Movement hoped to see the fulfilment of *The Great Commission*. Yet it is important to notice that while Zwemer's encounter with the SVM encouraged him to be a worker in the foreign mission field, it was James Cantine who left a lasting impression of the need of missions to Muslims while he was at college. Moreover, while being influenced by SVM in the earlier part of his life, Zwemer would become a prominent figure in the latter part of his life in awakening numerous young people to undertake missionary work in the Muslim world.

An important part of missionary motivation was devotion for the cause of Christ and wanting to share such an encounter with the rest of the world; this was a strong characteristic of Martyn, French and Pfander and, in turn, Zwemer.⁴⁴ Werff and Daniel take the view that from the mid 19th century onward Protestant mission to Muslims developed by integration of 'pietism', 'rationalism' and inherited polemical arguments.⁴⁵ While such an assertion is partly true, it is probable that an eschatological outlook would have shaped the development of missions. That is to say, the anticipation of the end of the world with the second coming of Christ would have given urgency for such a task. In the chapters to follow we will see to what degree Zwemer was influenced with such outlooks

⁴² Metcalf, *Report of The First International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions*, 26.

⁴³ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 6-7. Hogg, 'The Rise of Protestant Missionary concern, 1517-1914', 109.

⁴⁴ Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, 82. Bennett, 'The legacy of Henry Martyn', 10. Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, Vol 1, 14.

⁴⁵ Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 29. Daniel, *Islam Europe and Empire*, 9.

in his works on Islam. Additionally, we will consider whether pietism was a motivational factor in Zwemer's work among Muslims, while also asking whether he followed the classic objections to the claims of Muhammad's prophetic office and the divine origin of the Islamic scripture.

2.5. Deferent Methods for an effective Mission to Muslims

Unlike the unique efforts of Raymond Lull, St Francis of Assisi and Henry Martyn, history is lacking in Christian mission to Muslims. This is until the 18th century where we observe Protestants to have been active in mission to Muslims particularly the Moravian Missionaries.⁴⁶ Yet it is in the 19th century where we discover systematic missionary engagement with Muslims through the establishment of numerous 'missionary and Bible societies' aiming to send out missionaries to the Muslim world.⁴⁷ Such efforts were undertaken primarily by American and British initiatives. Smith asserts that missionaries to Muslims in the 'great century' emphasised the lack of redemption found in Islam while holding a low view on Muhammad in affirming that he was an imposter, dishonest and demonically inspired.⁴⁸ Yet it's clear that Smith fails to acknowledge the sympathetic school that emerged in the 19th century which show the Muslim prophet on a better light. Its clear that, missionaries touched by evangelical fervour such as Zwemer found it important to show the lack of salvation found in Islam and the manner in which they could obtain assurance of eternal life. They did this believing that Islam was a religion which was bankrupt and non-redemptive.⁴⁹ As well as this, they asserted that Islam was not considered as *proto-envangel* but as an hindrance for a divine encounter,⁵⁰ even labelled as 'artfully planned to destroy souls'.⁵¹ Hence, Missionaries have engaged with Islam as a means of disproving its truth claim while preaching the exclusive claim of

⁴⁶ Hutton, 'Moravian Missions in Moslem Lands'.

⁴⁷ Smith, 'Christian Missionary Views of Islam in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', 357. *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference, Held at Ootacamund*, 311. Hutton, 'Moravian Missions in Moslem Lands'.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Christian Missionary*, 358. In Chapter 4 we will explore to what degree Zwemer held and diverted from such a view.

⁴⁹ Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 17. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 76.

⁵⁰ Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 81.

⁵¹ *Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference, Held at Ootacamund*, 311.

Christianity.⁵² Yet, the majority of missionaries were motivated through love and real concern in sharing the means of salvation as they understood it as exemplified through their lifelong dedication to see this come to pass, despite the setbacks that could be discerned.⁵³ Likewise, Zwemer was motivated by his desire to see Muslims come to faith rather than for financial gain or prestige as is exemplified in his engagement with Muslims and the simple life he chose to live.

An Important agency which undertook outreach to the Islamic World was the Arabia Mission established in the latter part of the 19th century. The manner in which Zwemer took part in the establishment of the mission will be explored in section 3.3.1. Of great influence upon the formation of the *Arabian Mission* is the fictional work by David Abeel entitled *Missionary Convention at Jerusalem* (1838). It describes the gathering of Christians in Jerusalem from all over the world as a means of reinforcing the calling of the church to world mission. Particularly, chapter 11 describes an account of a ‘convert’ from Islam. The work asserts that ‘[h]ave not many centuries of gloom and wretchedness to the heathen world, proved that God does not preach the gospel himself’. And, despite the difficulty of undertaking missions in the Islamic world, Muslims are so eager to hear the gospel.⁵⁴ Such argument is discernable and repeated by John Lansing in the manifesto of the establishment of the *Arabian Mission* in 1891,⁵⁵ and it is very likely that such work would have shaped Zwemer’s outlook of Islam and the urgent nature of missionary work among Muslims. On the other hand, such work might not have been of such influence on Zwemer given that it does not seem go beyond other works which expound the need for the fulfilment of *The Great Commission* other than mention Muslims in such effort.

⁵² Levonian, *Studies in The Relationship Between Islam and Christianity*, 101. Muslims strongly opposed missionary activity among them especially the endeavour of converting Muslims; as a response there has been an attempt at adequate changes to the aspects which need modification and in making it relevant for the times. On the one hand, Sir Ahmad Khan attempted to reform Islam and aimed to respond to critical work on Islam by disproving it or making it compatible with the doctrine of Islam. While on the other hand, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, from the Islamic school of Deoband, rejected any attempts of reform but rather responded with a fundamentalist and puritan Islam. Devanandan, ‘The Resurgence of Non-Christian Religions’, 149-50. Ayoub, *Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict*, 33. Sharma, *History of Christian Missions*, 157. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 100.

⁵³ Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism*, 13. Ayoub, *Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict*, 38.

⁵⁴ Abeel, *The Missionary Convention at Jerusalem*, 60- 2.

⁵⁵ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission’s Story*, 132.

2.5.1. Islamic Study

European influence in the Muslim world through colonialism in the 19th century and even earlier brought forth new scholarship on Islam. In having had a firsthand encounter of the Muslim world Missionaries were at the forefront in such ground-breaking learning. Such studies explored the formation, philosophy and sociology of the religion.⁵⁶ Hourani affirms that in the 19th century most of the students of Islam's understanding of the religion was limited to its scripture, its prophet and the history of the Islamic expansion.⁵⁷ Such a shallow outlook of Islam as a religion would likely have brought limitation in the greater comprehension of the religion. On the other hand, with Zwemer, we can discern an anthropological approach to the study of Islam as made apparent in his study of contemporary Islam manifested on a popular level.

Lack of preparedness for the task ahead was not uncommon among missionaries, since arriving in the foreign land they encountered what their academic training alone could not prepare them for, which was a first hand experience of the religion and practices of the locals.⁵⁸ Martyn was no exception and, in realizing that the lack of comprehension of Islam hindered him in effective evangelism, he 'read everything [he] could pick up about Mohammedans.'⁵⁹ Unlike Martyn's initial encounter with Muslims, which was lacking in the basic belief and practice of Muslims, by Zwemer's time training in Muslim evangelism would have come a long way. No doubt Martyn's ground-breaking work contributed in the effective training of missionaries to the Muslim world. Such scholarship in mission was to be repeated by those who would later undertake mission among Muslims; given this, his pioneering work gave birth to the continuing legacy of 'missionary scholarship.'⁶⁰ It is probable that Zwemer followed such traditions, as exemplified in his writings and *The Moslem World* journal he established, which had the overall purpose of effective evangelism amongst Muslims. However, Zwemer would

⁵⁶ Riddell, 'Islamic Nations and Cultures', 599-00.

⁵⁷ Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 24.

⁵⁸ Cracknell, *Justice Courtesy and Love*, 78.

⁵⁹ Padwick, *Henry Martyn, Confessor, of The Faith*, 106.

⁶⁰ Bennett, 'The Legacy of Henry Martyn' 13.

have taken scholarship further in his study of popular Islam as he believed that it was not adequate to study Islam just from a western perspective or through Islamic reformers but, rather, it was necessary to explore the religion as practiced by the masses. In the chapters to come we will see in greater detail whether Zwemer was influenced by Martyn in his perception of Muslims.

2.5.2. Humanitarian Work

Zwemer is very clear concerning what missionaries are called to do: that is, to share the gospel message; the role of humanitarian activity should be the means to an end and not an end in itself.⁶¹ He held such a view in a context where humanitarian work played a vital part in 19th century mission work and believed that the preaching of the gospel and social transformation were intertwined.⁶² In light of the fact that missionaries voyaged on the same ships as used by explorers, civil servants and soldiers, their overall aim was different. It is clear that at times there was not just disagreement here but, rather, Christians became the strongest opponents of colonial rule and became campaigners for ‘indigenous-national interests.’ Moreover, the strong emphasis in disassociation from politics and policies of countries of origin were a distinct feature of the nineteenth-century missionaries.⁶³ Martyn is a good example that imperialism need not be part of protestant mission vis-à-vis those who compared mission to include the endeavour of westernization.⁶⁴ Yet again, it is clear that those who did not equate mission with imperialism were persistent in seeing the backwardness of Islamic law which sanctions activities such as polygamy and the amputation of hands as best fitting seventh-century Arabia. Hence, it was believed that the present culture would best do without it; rather, they advocated the paradigm of Christianity as exemplified through Christ as being

⁶¹ Den Berg, ‘The Middle East’, 462-3.

⁶² Lewis, *World Mission*, 10. Daniel, *Islam Europe and Empire*, 259. While missionaries influenced by Albrecht Ritschl and his interpretation of Christianity as a source of ‘ethics’ were more inclined in seeing mission to be a social gospel and not the preaching of the redemptive work of Christ as a means of salvation. Hogg, ‘The Rise of The Protestant Missionary concern, 1517-1914’, 108-9.

⁶³ Smith, *Missionary Researches in Armenia*, 196. Werff, *Christian Mission*, 97. Berg, *Constrained by Jesus’ Love*, 146.

⁶⁴ Bennett, ‘The Legacy of Henry Martyn’ 13.

thought to be the superior model.⁶⁵ As far as Muslims were concerned they would have possibly reacted to humanitarian work in their midst with great suspicion since such effort would have been equated as an enticement to convert through material gain.

2.5.3. Missionary Cooperation

The 19th century saw a new openness in wanting to work with the Roman Catholics in regard to mission work as well as the Eastern Churches as a means of having effective evangelism of Muslims.⁶⁶ Zwemer was keen in Christian ecumenism for the common cause of mission yet such vision did not originate with him. Such outlook was contemplated by Carey since he hoped to see a missionary conference in the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa) and hoped to bring together missionaries from different denominations of the Christian churches. This is in the light of good signs developing in the correspondence undertaken between missionaries from different parts of the world which asserted that '[w]e should understand each other better in two days than in two years of correspondence.'⁶⁷ In addition, Martyn was ecumenical in his outlook towards the Christian church, while belonging to the Church of England; in his engagement with Muslims he identified himself as a follower of Jesus Christ, which was pivotal for setting the common cause the church upheld.⁶⁸ Believing that enmity between the Mission agencies would be counter productive Martyn, along with some of his contemporaries, established the Associated Clergy who purposed in being a research centre where new ideas were discussed and shared with like-minded individuals.⁶⁹ It is feasible that Carey and Martyn had been influential on Zwemer's establishment of the nondenominational journal *The Moslem world*, and the missionary conference he organized for the united effort of Muslim evangelism which will be looked at closely in chapter 3. Yet, it is highly likely that such close cooperation would not necessarily produce united mission to the Muslim world, but rather the differences in theology and Missiological methods within

⁶⁵ Den Berg, 'The Middle East', 463-4. Such concern could be discerned clearly in Zwemer's work, particularly in his observation of the treatment of the weak member of the society.

⁶⁶ Rouse, 'William Carey's 'Pleasing Dream'', 188-9.

⁶⁷ Rouse, 'William Carey's 'Pleasing Dream'', 181.

⁶⁸ Bennett, 'The legacy of Henry Martyn'. 13.

⁶⁹ Bennett, 'The legacy of Henry Martyn'. 13.

the different denominations could have brought hindrances in the implementation of such vision.

2.5.4. Evangelism Through The Oriental Churches

The willingness to work with the Oriental churches as a means of evangelising the Muslims was not unique to Zwemer, but rather it had been widely seen as an important tool for outreach in the Muslim world. One of the influential missionary societies, the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM), established in 1810, strategy was reviving the Oriental churches to be an effective witness of Christianity and consecutively to be a launching pad for an outreach to the Muslim world.⁷⁰ While they found commonality on theological grounds they perceived the Orient's soteriology to be distorted.⁷¹ Such greater cooperation of missionaries with the Oriental Churches was due to the apostolic Christianity they shared vis-à-vis the dogmatic differences they encountered with Islam. Moreover, Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight who undertook field research in the early part of the nineteenth century came to the conclusion that effective witness of the Orthodox Church in Armenia to Muslims should be the prime focus of missions before outreach should start among Muslims.⁷² This made it clear that by Zwemer's time it was commonly accepted that the outreach in the Muslim world had to start with the ancient churches. However, as we will discover in section 3.4.1., Zwemer's concern did not just see the Oriental Churches as a means of undertaking missions to Muslims but rather as a partner with whom effective Muslim evangelism could be undertaken; he asserted this while advocating that some form of reformation was needed. However, in Zwemer's first missionary work in Arabia, which was the 'ultraconservative heart of Islam,' he directed his efforts towards Muslim evangelism due to the lack of Oriental Churches.⁷³ Such an approach would raise the question of its effectiveness. This

⁷⁰ Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 38. Dwight & Smith, *Missionary Researches in Armenia*, 409. Anderson, *Oriental Churches*, 15.

⁷¹ Anderson, *Oriental Churches*, Vol 1, 2-3.

⁷² Dwight & Smith, *Missionary Researches in Armenia*, 464. Werff, *Christian Mission*, 106-7. Initially, such strategy was primarily due to the prohibition of Ottoman of conversion of its subject by the implementation of the law of apostasy, making it the greatest hindrance missionaries faced for an effective outreach in the Muslims world. Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 122-3.

⁷³ Werff, *Christian Mission*, 102. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 53.

is because such churches did not participate in missionary endeavour or at least missionary endeavour as understood by the missionary agencies.

2.5.5. Confrontational Approach

In Christian engagement with Muslims, a controversial approach had been one of the means by which outreach had been carried out. Such effort is considered as a preparation for Muslim evangelism. While looking at such an approach, Zwemer reflected on the reformed Baptist minister Charles Spurgeon's assertion that the role of an evangelist is one that proclaims the gospel but not one that gets involved in controversy.⁷⁴ Yet, Zwemer found it important to undertake controversy in the efforts of Muslim evangelism. We discover that Pfander had come to such a conclusion in the light of the opposition he experienced while preaching. As he saw it, Muslims 'would not listen to any full and lengthened statement of Christian doctrine nor to any explicit argument in favour of the gospel... such important subjects [could not] be brought forward without constant interruption from the opponent.'⁷⁵ In the light of such common experience Zwemer did not see controversy to be incompatible with missions since he found such endeavour was carried out by the Apostles as portrayed in the New Testament. Moreover, he affirmed that controversy is a tool for evangelism, as a 'plough breaks up the soil before the seed is sown so this kind of literature and argument will often break up the fallow ground of Moslem hearts for the seed of God's word.'⁷⁶ Zwemer observes that Lull adopted a confrontation approach in his attempts to logically demonstrate the discrepancies of Islam as a means of seeing greater conversion in his engagement with Muslims.⁷⁷

Likewise, Martyn's debate with a learned Muslim was a means of awakening the 'spirit of inquiry.' However, he made it clear that divine intervention through the proclamation

⁷⁴ Zwemer, *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam*, 385.

⁷⁵ Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries*, 138.

⁷⁶ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 386.

⁷⁷ It is important to point out that while Zwemer was in agreement with Lull's assertion that Islam, as a false belief, must come to an end he was not convinced by the strength of Lull's argument. Not surprisingly, we don't find Zwemer repeating Lull's argument in his refutation of Islam. Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 314.

of the gospel was the primary channel for seeing Muslim converts.⁷⁸ He presented an ‘evangelical’ outlook in his missionary activity; his tracts written in response to Mirza Ibrahim echoing previous polemics directed at Islam.⁷⁹ In addition, Zwemer sees Martyn as an example of an effective controversialist in the light of the opposition and polemics directed against Christ and Christian truth.⁸⁰ Martyn used controversy in his Tracts through rebuttal of the Muslims’ claim for the ‘truth of Islam’ as opposed to stating the divine origin of Islam and the prophetic nature of Muhammad. Martyn saw it otherwise. He by no means saw Muhammad as a prophet in any form: since he was not foretold in the Christian scriptures nor performed any sign or wonder but rather the spread of his religion was solely due to the promise of sensual gratification in the present life and the hereafter.⁸¹ It’s important to point out that, Martyn’s critical approach to Islam was much more apparent in his pamphlets as oppose to his face to face encounter of Muslims.

Bennett affirms that Martyn was not totally convinced of the effectiveness of controversy, given that he concluded his Tracts diplomatically that his prayer for the *ulama* is that God would guide them to the truth even if they did not find his pamphlet convincing.⁸² However, Bennett’s assessment is not accurate given that for Martyn it was nether a matter of being confrontational in his tracts nor giving the hand of friendship to Muslims, but a matter of accommodating both in his evangelism. Since, for Martyn as well as Zwemer, the main objection was not directed at Muslims but rather the Islamic claim concerning Muhammad and the Quran, which they found to be a hindrance to the divine plan of salvation. Yet again, the confrontational approach had been used as a response to polemical work by Muslims on Christians. The Agra debate of 1854 between Rahmal Allah Kairanawi and Pfander could be such example, given that Rahmal Allah used western critical work directed at the Christian scripture with which the opponent was not familiar.⁸³ It is possible that Pfander’s encouragement of Muir to write the

⁷⁸ Wilberforce, *Journals and Letters of the Rev. Henry Martyn*, 466.

⁷⁹ Daniel, *Islam Europe and Empire*, 255-56.

⁸⁰ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 385.

⁸¹ Sargent, *A Memoir of The Rev. Henry Martyn*, 348. Parsons, *Unveiling God*.

⁸² Bennett, ‘The legacy of Henry Martyn’. 13.

⁸³ The debate was aimed at covering ‘abrogation’, ‘corruption’, Trinity, Muhammad and the Quran. However, stalemate was reached on the first point and there was no time to cover the remaining topics. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*, 250.

critical work entitled *The Life of Mohamet* (4 vols) was due to the lack of critical work on Islam in either the western world or the Islamic sources.⁸⁴ Zwemer would later reflect on Muir's work on Muhammad as a work legitimate to be censored by the authority in the Islamic land; since Muir was the proponent of such an approach he viewed Islam as *contra* to what truth is and as a challenger of the church; the good it upheld was due to borrowing from the truth of Christianity.⁸⁵ In the chapters to come we will see to what degree Muir's confrontational approach in the study of Islam influenced Zwemer. Yet, a question that arises is whether Muir upheld his confrontational approach to Islam due to his study of the primary sources on the Islamic prophet or whether his Christian conviction had a part to play in coming to such a conclusion.

Despite the fact that Zwemer did not participate in public controversy or debates, unlike his predecessors, we will discover in the subsequent chapter that Zwemer adopted a confrontational approach in his engagement with Islam. Such an approach could be discerned in Martyn, Pfander and Muir, while French was less inclined to employ such methods; his encounter of Islam led him to the conclusion that the two religions were theologically irreconcilable given that they were contradictory to each other on fundamental concepts.⁸⁶ Moreover, with the different approaches we have looked at in relation to mission to Muslims, the confrontational approach was probably met with great resistance by Muslims for the reason that it hits at the foundations of Islamic teaching. Given this, it challenged the authority of the Islamic scripture and the prophetic nature of Muhammad.

⁸⁴ See preface to Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and History of Islam*, Vol 1. Kerr, 'Muir, William', 478.

⁸⁵ On the opposite spectrum in the study of Islam in the 19th century we would find Charles Forster and his advocacy for a 'conciliatory' approach. Bennett, *Victorian Images of Islam*, x. Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 16. Riddell, 'Islamic Nations and Cultures', 600. Forster's work *Mahometanism Unveiled* (1822) which brought a new perspective on the Islamic prophet has been criticized for being 'bizarre' and of no use in the portrayal of a reasonable account of the life of Muhammad. Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 21.

⁸⁶ Birks, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French*, vol 1, 69. Temple Gairdner would repeat such an assertion in the final chapter of *The Reproach of Islam*. As well as this, the renowned Christian theologian Colin Gunton, while exploring the similarity between the two faiths, would come to the same conclusion. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, 2.

2.6. Conclusion

We could discern that 19th century missionary to Muslims were evangelically-minded individuals: Martyn's and Pfander's pioneering spirits, Muir's academic excellence and French's mentorship would possibly had a lasting impact on Zwemer. Whereas he spoke highly of Lull's missionary effort, Zwemer falls short in finding his argument convincing. Moreover, Zwemer's eagerness in seeing the fulfillment of *The Great Commission* in the Muslim world is a reflection of protestant missionary outreach to the non-Christian world. Likewise, missionaries believed that everyone is in need of salvation through Christ and, analogous to Zwemer, engaged with Muslims through the preaching of the gospel on the one hand and the emphasis of the lack of salvation found in Islam on the other. Given this, they were critical of Islam on soteriological grounds believing that Islam distorted or misrepresented fundamental Christian doctrine; therefore, they concluded that Islam and Christianity were an irreconcilable reality while asserting the finality of Christianity. As we will see in the chapters to come, Zwemer's adoption of a controversial approach to Islam was due to being influenced by the confrontational school.

However, one common occurrence was firstly to separate the religion from its followers, that is, while being critical of the Islamic prophet and scripture, love was showed to Muslims. Secondly, willingness in working with other denominations for the common cause of outreach to the non-Christian world could be seen. Both could be discerned with Zwemer. Moreover, he was encouraged by the missionary work carried out by his predecessors and in turn hoped to build on such a legacy. May we add that, looking at the study of the history of Christian mission to Muslims is vital given that past errors could be avoided and future dialogue and missionary activity by Christian to Muslim or vice versa could follow ethically-guided principles. Turning to Zwemer we will see the degree of influence upon him by missionaries and the methods implemented in the preceding sections as we now turn to the intellectual biography of Zwemer.

3. Intellectual Biography of Zwemer



Samuel M. Zwemer with an inquirer in Cairo, 1921

3.1. Introduction

Seven hundred miles of touring along populous rivers and historic ruins; seven hundred miles of Moslem empire awaiting the conquests of the Cross...[and to] be occupied, village after village, by schools and Gospel agencies.⁸⁷

The above was written in Zwemer's diary in his first encounter of Arabia and which more or less summarised his vision for the missionary work in the Muslim world. As a western Christian Zwemer's mission and study were undertaken from an outside perspective despite his stay in the Islamic world. Unlike Christians who encountered Islam from within, such as Theodore Abu Qurra, (8th and 9th century) he comes from a different perspective. Following chapter 2 where we explored the manner in which Zwemer was influenced, this chapter will undertake an intellectual biography. To this end, we will explore his missionary endeavour to Muslims and the different methodology he used, followed by his response to the missionary debate of the post 1920 era. Most importantly, it will look at his writings as a window through which we can explore his view of Islam. But first we will have a brief overview of Zwemer's biography to help us have a bird's eye view of his life.

3.2. Overview of Zwemer's Life

Samuel Zwemer was born on April 12 1867 in Vriesland, Michigan from Dutch immigrant parents. His bright character became apparent from a young age; by the age of five he had learned English, Dutch and French. Similar to the biblical account of Hanna's dedication of Samuel to God, Zwemer was dedicated as a child to the work of mission.⁸⁸ Prayer and scripture reading were an essential part of his family life while growing up and it is no wonder that Zwemer dedicated his life to God from a young age. In this regard, his upbringing no doubt encouraged him to 'hear the call to the Gospel ministry

⁸⁷ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 96.

⁸⁸ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 28. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 140. For a biographical work on Zwemer see *Apostle to Islam: A Biography of Samuel M. Zwemer* by J. Christy Wilson. The introduction of Roger Greenway work *Islam and The Cross* presents concise chronological overview of Zwemer's life.

and later enter foreign service.’⁸⁹ For ministry training Zwemer joined the New Brunswick Seminary, which was part of the Reformed Church in America and was an evangelistically minded school. At the Seminary Zwemer came in contact with Dr John G. Lansing who was born in Syria of missionary parents and who had a unique first-hand experience of the Muslim world and culture.⁹⁰ As he was under the age of sixty Lansing was the youngest ‘faculty member’ who was known for his gracious and approachable personality.⁹¹

Zwemer envisioned a ground-breaking work believing that Muslims should not be excluded from mission. In the 1890s Zwemer was one of many that had purposed in taking the gospel to the Muslim world for the purpose of the ‘evangelization of the world in this generation.’⁹² After finishing his studies at the seminary and receiving his ordination, he travelled to Beirut along with James Cantine a fellow missionary to continue advanced study in Arabic. He learned it despite its difficulty as a means of engaging Muslims in the ‘language of the angels’.⁹³ He reflected humorously upon the difficult nature of correct pronunciation when stating that ‘[s]ome Arabic letters cannot be transliterated into English, although certain grammars take infinite pain to accomplish the impossible. The gutturals belong to the desert and, doubtless, were borrowed from the camel when it complained of overloading.’⁹⁴ Indeed, Zwemer perfected his Arabic to the point that he would some years later along with Gardner be instrumental in the establishment of *The School of Oriental Studies* in Egypt, for the purpose of training missionaries in the Arabic language.⁹⁵

They both joined Lansing in Cairo for research in possible opportunity for missionary work in the Arabian Peninsula and other Muslim lands. The detailed investigations lead them to Basrah where the *Mission* was active for six years. It was here Zwemer met up with Amy Elizabeth Wilkes. As a qualified nurse Amy along with Zwemer’s medical

⁸⁹ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 21.

⁹⁰ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 19.

⁹¹ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission’s Story*, 135.

⁹² Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 222. Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 13.

⁹³ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 34.

⁹⁴ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 35-6.

⁹⁵ Addison, *The Christian Approach to The Moslem*, 158.

training would become of great importance in relieving the physical suffering of the locals. While he acknowledged his inexperience in medicine, he reassured himself with an old proverb which says ‘In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is King.’⁹⁶ Zwemer’s short medical training and the establishment of a Hospital in Bahrain is reflective of his influence by the nineteenth century ‘humanitarian’ missionary endeavour.⁹⁷ Zwemer Married Amy on May 18, 1896, in Baghdad and it is said that he ‘purchased his wife in true oriental fashion’ in having paid for her travel expenses to the mission field.⁹⁸ Not long after this, Zwemer and Amy were sent to Bahrain to pioneer and open a mission office where he shared the gospel at every opportunity he had. This was primarily through personal evangelism and working along with American Bible Society in scripture and tracts distribution, in which he was later joined by Peter his brother. An unfortunate event overtook the Zwemer’s family when his younger brother Peter died in 1898. Zwemer and Amy’s two daughters died in 1904 while in the mission field. In 1905 he was appointed as secretary of the reformed Board of Foreign Missions and representative spokesperson for new recruits of the Student Volunteer Movement. This opened the door to him to influence many students to accept the call to foreign missionary work.⁹⁹

In the following years, Zwemer travelled regularly to Egypt in order to teach at the Presbyterian Seminary, to ‘Persian Gulf’ where he addressed the locals and was involved in the promotion of book dissemination and write more works on Islam. In 1929 Zwemer took the position of Professor of Missions in Princeton Theological Seminary. This post was a great opportunity in seeing to pass his greatest passion in life: recruiting workers for overseas mission. At the age of seventy-one he retired from the seminary and in 1937 Amy, his missionary partner and comforter through different hardship passed away unexpectedly. Having been introduced to Margaret Clarke, some years later Zwemer remarried. In reflecting on his life Zwemer stated:

⁹⁶ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 114.

⁹⁷ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 132-3. Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 249. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 61.

⁹⁸ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 47, Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 115.

⁹⁹ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 13.

I am now in my 81st year and have spent sixty years thinking of the Moslem world and its problems.... Never have I regretted choosing a hard field and an impossible task. How much has changed for the better, and how many doors have opened in Arabia since 1890, and in all Asia and Africa.¹⁰⁰

Zwemer was active with the Inter-Varsity Student Foreign Missions Fellowship Convention (Toronto) from its beginning in 1946 – which finds its genesis from the Student Volunteer Conventions, which Zwemer has contributed a great deal. And in 1952 Zwemer experienced cardiac arrest after he gave consecutive lectures at the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship held in New York. In April 2, 1952, a few days before he turned eighty-five, the life that had been dedicated to Muslim evangelism, showing love to Muslims and motivated many to be active in the mission field, came to an end.¹⁰¹

3.3. Mission to Muslims

Zwemer's view of the importance in sharing the gospel to all nations was his motivation in leaving his relatively comfortable life in America to go to the desert of Arabia and all the hardship such endeavour brought. Interestingly, Zwemer's dedication to Muslim evangelism was in the context of a contradictory perception of Arabia in the west. On the one hand, works such as *Arabian Nights* excited the imagination of the reader. While on the other hand, damaging news of acts of brutality brought disgust to western ears. As far as evangelism was concerned Missionaries generally preferred to work with nominal Christians and those of no particular faith rather than Muslims, due to the difficulty of seeing converts.¹⁰²

As a Calvinist and one who upheld the authority of scripture Zwemer was practically in agreement with the protestant view of world evangelism as the fulfilment of the great commission (Matthew 28:19). He believed that there was no salvation found in Islam (John 14:6) and that Muslims should turn to Christianity (Acts 17: 23). We can discern that Zwemer by no means held a liberal theology but rather was critical of work that

¹⁰⁰ From Unpublished work by Zwemer cited in Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 240.

¹⁰¹ Greenway, *Islam and The Cross*, xv.

¹⁰² Addison, *The Christian Approach*, 310.

denied the heart of the Christian truth such as the nature of the atonement and the divinity of Christ. He upheld the conviction that while undertaking missionary work among Muslims one should not shy away from such a doctrine but rather put it at the forefront of one's proclamation of the gospel.¹⁰³ It is on such basis Zwemer warns of the error to those not grounded in an in-depth understanding of Christian truth, since they could easily mistake Islam as a simple deviation as Muslim searchers of the truth.¹⁰⁴ His outlook towards Muslims is reflected by George Fry who asserts that despite the resistance of Muslims to missionary work, such an endeavour should be carried out since only through faith in Christ's atoning work could they obtain salvation to eternal life.¹⁰⁵

3.3.1. Arabian Mission

Zwemer interest with Arabia started while in Seminary, Dr John G. Lansing's ill health would hinder him from returning to Damascus and, as he saw it appropriate to pass his mantle to his students, it could be said that Zwemer's passion for the Muslim world finds its genesis in his classroom.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, John R. Mott, addressing the student Volunteer Movement, confirmed his desires to serve on the mission field.¹⁰⁷ Hoping to see their vision of evangelism among Muslims in Arabia with the help of Lansing, Zwemer along with James Cantine and Philip Phelps established the *Arabian Mission* in 1891. Interestingly, no missionary agencies were willing to support the *Mission* financially, possibly due to the difficult nature of missions in the Islamic world. The vision was to face Islam head on by establishing missions at the heart of Islam in Arabia. Mission centres opened in Basrah, Muscat and Bahrain, which had the scriptural motto 'O That Ishmael might live before thee' (Gen 17:18).¹⁰⁸ Aiming to propagate the only means of

¹⁰³ Greenway, *Islam and The Cross*, xvi.

¹⁰⁴ Zwemer, *Thinking Missions with Christ*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Terry, *A Suggested Approach to Sunni Muslims*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 136. For a detailed account of Zwemer's mission to Arabia see Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone: Reminiscences of Pioneer Days Fifty Ago in Arabia*.

¹⁰⁷ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Montrose, *Christian Missions and Islam*, 4-5. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 136. Addison, *The Christian Approach to The Moslem*, 196.

eternal salvation, as they believed it, vis-à-vis the lack of salvation found in Islam.¹⁰⁹ Because Islam was the greatest challenge missionaries faced in world evangelism such engagement was seen as an essential part.¹¹⁰ Wilson looks at the challenge Zwemer faced in the Muslim world when reflecting on the fact that Arabia is the hardest mission front Christianity faced. In this regard, Zwemer by no means underestimated the challenge he faced in the mission field, but rather he wanted to face the challenge of Islam head on by applying to the ‘antidote of the Christian Gospel at the very source’ where the Islamic religion finds its genesis, where fanaticism is ripe and where conversion to Christianity is minimal.¹¹¹

He acknowledges many individuals who had prepared the ground for mission to Muslims. As we have seen in chapter 2 the manner in which Henry Martyn’s ‘confrontational approach’ influenced him, we discover that Zwemer perceived Martyn to be the first in his current era who had undertaken mission to Muslims. In addition, Major-General F. T. Haig, the first to explore the Arabian Peninsula, and Keith Falconer who followed in his steps to be the guiding pillars in the manner and the place in which the *Arabian Mission* would be established.¹¹² Nevertheless, Zwemer was clear in the price that was paid for such a mission to be established, since, Keith Falconer and Bishop Thomas Valpy French’s dead in Arabia while labouring to see the greater service of Christian mission to come to pass.¹¹³ Furthermore, the sudden death of his assistant Kamil Abdul Masih which was suspected as being due to poisoning by ‘fanatics’ was the first martyr the *Mission* faced.¹¹⁴ Zwemer was aware of the death penalty implemented on those who leave Islam as agreed in the four Islamic schools of jurisprudence. While the *Mission* started without the financial backing from the Reformed Church it was later incorporated in to the board of the denomination, since, the *mission* groundbreaking work in Arabia was such of significance.

¹⁰⁹ Speer, ‘How to Arouse the Church at Home to the needs of Islam’, 269. Montrose, *Christian Missions and Islam*, 93-4. Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 225.

¹¹⁰ Scudder, *The Arabian Mission’s Story*, 149.

¹¹¹ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 39.

¹¹² Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 322-331.

¹¹³ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 331.

¹¹⁴ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 45.

Interestingly, Missionary endeavour in Arabia was compared with the book of Joshua's account of possessing the Promised Land.¹¹⁵ Yet Zwemer was clear in the insistence on a 'Holy War' not to be a military conquest but one of a spiritual conquest won through prayer.¹¹⁶ It needs to be clarified that he opposes greatly what was perpetrated by the Crusaders since it was not Christ-like to be waging military war, yet points out that their intuition was correct vis-à-vis the conquest of once-Christian land by Muslims.¹¹⁷

In *The Golden Milestone: Reminiscences of Pioneer Days Fifty Years Ago in Arabia*, Zwemer along with James Cantine reflected on the fifties year anniversary of their encounter of Arabia and the establishment of *Arabian Mission*. In view of the difficulty in undertaking such mission in Arabia, it could be asserted that Zwemer's and Cantine's mission to be a success.

3.3.2. Bookshop in Arabia

A significant part of the *Mission* endeavour in the Islamic world was establishing Bookshop. However, Zwemer was aware of the danger of such venture, as exemplified in his opening of a bookshop in Basrah which sold Bibles and tracts; it was censored by the authorities for material which could be offensive to Muslims. At one point people were discouraged from visiting the bookshop by a 'town crier'; when this failed the *mission* were ordered to leave town. In reopening the bookstore the sales of Bibles increased significantly as the 'town crier' denunciation proved to be a much-needed publicity stunt.¹¹⁸ As a policy for dissemination of the Bible Zwemer stated '[d]istributions should be by sale, not by free gift. We prize that which we pay for.'¹¹⁹ The Bible was advertised using Quranic terms to get the attention of by-passers. While Zwemer was in no doubt as to the lack of divine origin of the Quran – which will be explored in great length in Chapter 5 – he was prepared to use Quranic terms as a means of forming a bridge of communicating the gospel. Examples of this are: 'Come and see. Here is an Arabic

¹¹⁵ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 138.

¹¹⁶ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 256.

¹¹⁷ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 141-142.

¹¹⁸ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 113

¹¹⁹ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 210.

Gospel, a portion of the whole Injil of Isa the prophet'. Or 'You don't care to read the Holy book because it has been corrupted, you say? How do you know if you have not read it?'¹²⁰

3.4. The Role of Evangelism in Mission

Zwemer's zeal for world evangelism was influenced by his outlook on the importance of evangelisation, which was a preliminary for the millennium and the second coming of Christ.¹²¹ It is important to note that such a postmillennial view of eschatology is one that has divided the fundamentalist and liberal; while fundamentalists upheld the supernatural aspects of the end times, and the imminent second coming of Christ. The liberal school downplayed any supernatural realm and rejected every form of millennialism, which in turn influenced their conception of mission to be one of empowerment and social improvement.¹²² Hence, the crisis of Theology and mission manifested in the 1920's. Liberal school of theology started to affect some perceptions of mission. We discover that, in the background was the development of Charles Darwin's ideas concerning evolution and biblical criticism whereby Christian scriptures were put on the same category as the scriptures of non-Christian religions.¹²³ In this regard, Friedrich Max Muller rejected the missionaries' engagement in converting the 'heathens' but argued that they should be educated so that they could obtain a higher civilization and morality.¹²⁴

This brought forth the debate concerning the role of mission to be an endeavour of conversion or social gospel. The former entailed the exclusive effort of proselytizing those of different religions to Christianity while the latter involved the vision of educating the native as a means of bringing enlightenment.¹²⁵ The momentous work *Re-*

¹²⁰ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 112.

¹²¹ Zwemer, *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam*, 403. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 59.

¹²² Moorhead, 'The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925', 76-77.

¹²³ Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 185-6.

¹²⁴ Muller, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Muller*, 66. Moorhead, 'The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925', 76-77. Albert Schweitzer was one who understood mission to be the work undertaken in view of the sanctity of life: *Christianity and the Religions of the World*.

¹²⁵ Harris, *Nothing But Christ*, 39. Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions*, xiv.

thinking Missions (1932) was written as an assertion that mission in the present context was a modernising endeavour. To this Zwemer responded in *Thinking Missions with Christ* (1934) and the counter argument that we need to stop thinking in grey and go back to the apostolic preaching of salvation found exclusively in Christ. He considered such a view to be a disparagement on mission, since Christianity was unique in comparison with other religions. He based his understanding on *a priori* knowledge of taking Christian scripture as a witness to the divine revelation manifested through Christ and the biblical mandate of the great commission.¹²⁶ Which parallels the Barthian view of salvation found exclusively through Christ and not in any of the world religions nor ideology.¹²⁷ He found it necessary to not being distracted from the true calling of mission to Muslims and not shying away from showing the lack of salvation found in their religion. Interestingly, in contrast to the lack of missionary zeal among the mainstream protestant churches, revival for missions was taking over evangelically oriented and traditionalist churches, It was with such churches Zwemer participated in.¹²⁸ However, resistant to foreign mission was not limited to the liberal camp but rather by some within the evangelical Churches, asserting that, missionary work in the ‘home field’ was needed. Zwemer tried to offer some perspective in this matter by stating ‘[i]t makes me sad to think of fourteen or sixteen pastors in a small town like New Brunswick preaching to pews and purse-proud Christians.... And then these very men sometimes object to foreign [mission] work on account of the needs of the home field.’¹²⁹ Zwemer’s view of mission was clearly an undertaking of seeing the fulfilment of *The Great Commission* and the role of humanitarian work was a tool for evangelizing Muslims.

¹²⁶ Zwemer, *Christianity, The Final Religion*, 42. Zwemer, *Thinking Missions with Christ*, 34. Hendrik Kraemer parallels Zwemer in his view of mission and orthodoxy while being less confrontational in his methodology. Yates, *Christian Mission in The Twentieth Century*, 108.

¹²⁷ Barth, ‘Revelation’, 53.

¹²⁸ Greenway, *Islam and The Cross*, xiv-xvi.

¹²⁹ Letter written on January 23 1888 to Frederick J. Zwemer, in New Brunswick Seminary Library archive. Cited in Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes*, 32.

3.4.1. Christian Ecumenism

Zwemer acknowledged and was grateful for the hard work undertaken by Roman Catholic Islamicists not matched by Protestants.¹³⁰ In this regard, one of the ways Zwemer wanted to see effective evangelism of Muslims was through the ecumenical engagement of the Catholic churches united and active in evangelism. His vision of unity was to start with the Protestant churches, incorporate Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches included the Eastern Orthodox churches in this great endeavour.¹³¹ Zwemer's assertion for such endeavour is grounded in the belief that these different churches have a great deal in common vis-à-vis Islamic theology. As he put it, the 'Christian church Catholic will be forced to work out her theology and creeds experientially in contact and conflict with Unitarian, deistic Islam. In this respect the Mohammedan problem may possibly be as life from the dead to the Oriental Churches, when they face it real duty of evangelism.'¹³² And, with the formation of the World Council of Churches, Zwemer was one who encouraged the WCC to put missionary endeavour to the Muslim world as their main agenda. While Zwemer is uncertain how the mutual enhancement in the effort of Muslim evangelism would come to fruition, such a project was one that he wanted to initiate in his lifetime.¹³³

Nevertheless, Zwemer was not prepared to negotiate with what he considered to be gospel truth, since the heart of Christianity is the 'belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, who died on the Cross for our sins and arose again, who gave us this message as our only commission and sealed it with the promise of his presence.'¹³⁴ Yet, Zwemer did not confuse ecumenism with compromising Christian dogma, since he viewed those who had fallen to the Islamic error of the denial of Christ's divinity and rejection of atonement, to be outside such engagement.

¹³⁰ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 44-5.

¹³¹ Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 235.

¹³² Zwemer, *Muhammad or Christ*, 48.

¹³³ Zwemer, *A factual Survey of the Moslem World*, 28. Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 27.

¹³⁴ Zwemer, *Christianity, The Final Religion*, 3f. Greenway, *Islam and The Cross*, xvi.

3.4.2. Missionary Conferences

Missionary conference played an important part in Zwemer's ministry; he was the chairman of the first conference intended solely for missionaries to Muslims held in Cairo (1906). The ecumenical nature of the conference was apparent in the participation of twenty-nine missionary agencies with sixty-two representatives along with external visitors.¹³⁵ Moreover, Zwemer played a significant role in the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910. While one thousand missionaries attended this conference, the topic of Islam was not given the attention Zwemer thought it deserved.¹³⁶ Zwemer spoke passionately at the conference with the limited time he was assigned in regards to the 'problem of Islam' and the challenge Islam brought to world evangelism.¹³⁷

At Edinburgh the commissions' reported the openness of Muslims in India, Russia, parts of Turkey and Persia. While Islam was advancing in Africa and difficulty was faced in penetrating Arabia, mission was seen as an obtainable reality.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the problem was perceived to be in relation to the volume of the Muslim population as opposed to the theological challenge Islam brought. The overall consensus for the solution to Islam was perceived to be mission to Muslims, not dissimilar to the engagement with the diverse religions of the world. Zwemer differed in his conviction, since he viewed Islam as unique occurrence to be engaged differently in view of the challenge it brought to mission.¹³⁹ This lack of attention given to Islam at this conference was compensated for by the gathering of forty delegates, along with Zwemer, concerned for Muslim evangelism at the Lucknow (India) Conference in 1911.¹⁴⁰ The topic of Islamic resurgence and its impact on mission was discussed, the problem of Islam's

¹³⁵ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 171. Addison, *The Christian Approach to the moslem*, 148.

¹³⁶ Montrose, *Christian Mission and Islam*, 84. For a summary of the missionary work among Muslims presented at the conference see Charles R. Watson, 'The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and Islam'.

¹³⁷ Watson, 'The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and Islam', 66.

¹³⁸ Watson, 'The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and Islam', 69-61.

¹³⁹ Watson, 'The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and Islam', 59.

¹⁴⁰ Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt*, 92. Watson, 'The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and Islam', 66.

vigorous resistance, opposition and transgression against Christian mission, took an important place at the conference.¹⁴¹ At this conference there was a push to a greater degree of missionary endeavour to the Muslim world and the belief that there needed to be a new awakening which stressed the urgent nature of such a mission.¹⁴² Zwemer presented a paper which surveyed the Muslim world by looking at the ‘statistical’, political and further developments since the conference held in Cairo, as well as, changing attitude of the western churches to the Muslim world.¹⁴³ Zwemer’s contributions at Edinburgh and Lucknow could be considered as his greatest achievements not matched by other conferences he participated in.¹⁴⁴

3.5. Zwemer’s Writings

Cracknell affirmed that there was a dichotomy between scholarly work and field work as made apparent with most missionaries. Adding that, while few would contribute articles to theological journals, most missionaries were lacking in engagement with past and present scholarly works in the relevant field.¹⁴⁵ However, if Cracknell’s assessment of missionaries was true, Zwemer would be an exception on the grounds that he was a missionary who wrote from first-hand study of Islamic sources, encounters of the Islamic world and rituals: ‘the results are true and real descriptions of Muslim life and thought.’¹⁴⁶

As a prolific writer he wrote more than fifty books and numerous articles on the topic of ‘childhood’,¹⁴⁷ ‘womanhood’,¹⁴⁸ ‘statistical-geographical surveys’,¹⁴⁹ and Popular Islam,¹⁵⁰ as well as, anthropological¹⁵¹ ‘Devotional’¹⁵² biographical¹⁵³, mission¹⁵⁴ and

¹⁴¹ Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt*, 92.

¹⁴² Speer, ‘How to Arouse the Church at Home’, 269-70.

¹⁴³ Zwemer, *Islam and Missions*, 11.

¹⁴⁴ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 176.

¹⁴⁵ Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love*, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Calverley, ‘Samuel Marinus Zwemer’, 157.

¹⁴⁷ *Childhood in the Moslem World* (1915).

¹⁴⁸ *Moslem Women* (1926), Zwemer, with E. M. Wherry, *Our Moslem Sisters* (1907).

¹⁴⁹ *A Factual Survey of the Moslem World with Maps and Statistical Tables* (1947).

¹⁵⁰ *The Influence of Animism on Islam* (1920), *Studies in Popular Islam* (1939)

¹⁵¹ *The Origin of Religion* (1935).

Muslims.¹⁵⁵ One of his significant works is *The Disintegration of Islam* published in 1916 from a paper he read at Princeton Theological Seminary a year earlier. He addressed what he considered to be the problem with the religion and the 'new Islam' he sees emerging. However, it is in his work on Al-Gazali entitled *A Moslem Seeker After God: Life of Al-Ghazali* (1921) we could discern changes emerging in his view of Muslims. His encounter of sufi Islam brought forth a change in his use of terminology and view of Muslims from his previous works.¹⁵⁶ In 1923 *The Law of Apostasy in Islam* was published having been written in Cairo as a response to the lack of conversion from Islam. Zwemer's dedication in his writings is due to the belief that '[n]o agency can penetrate Islam so deeply, abide so persistently, witness so daringly and influence so irresistibly as the printed page.'¹⁵⁷ Interestingly, the influence of his scholarly work on Islam was not limited to the west but rippled out to the Muslim world. This was made apparent in a Cairo newspaper's reference to him as the 'leading authority on Islamics from the Christian standpoint.'¹⁵⁸ Zwemer's work was academically current, he read Orientalists' work which were critical as well as sympathetic to Islam; meanwhile it was clear that Zwemer's writing was from a missionary point of view for the purpose of missions.¹⁵⁹ As Zwemer puts it:

There are two ways of studying Islam: that of the scholar in his library and that of the practicing missionary. Both are necessary and missions can never repay their debt to, nor dispense with the work of, western scholars and Orientalists. Nevertheless, the man on the road or in the arena has advantages over the man on the balcony.¹⁶⁰

The first book he wrote was *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam* (1900) and it was written as a personal observation of the Arabian Peninsula, and has gone through four editions.

¹⁵² *The Glory of the Cross* (1928), *Taking Hold of God* (1936), *It is Hard to be a Christian* (1937) *The Glory of The Empty Tomb* (1947).

¹⁵³ Raymund Lull: *First Missionary to The Moslems* (1902), *A Moslem Seeker After God: Life of Al-Ghazali* (1921).

¹⁵⁴ *Christianity the Final Religion* (1920), *The Call to Prayer, Into All the World* (1923), *the Art of Listening to God* (1940), *How Reach The Harvest*(1948).

¹⁵⁵ *The Moslem Doctrine of God* (1905), *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (1907), *The Moslem World* (1908), *Across The World of Islam* (1929).

¹⁵⁶ Werff, *Our Muslim Neighbors*, 191-2.

¹⁵⁷ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 83.

¹⁵⁸ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 92.

¹⁵⁹ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle*, 5-6. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes*, 35, 40.

¹⁶⁰ Zwemer, *The Cross Above the Crescent*, 8.

Zwemer's biographer Christy Wilson sees this work as his *magnum opus* regardless of the fact that he wrote many more books of significance.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Sir William Muir, gave a positive evaluation of *Arabia* as being a ground-breaking work when he wrote:

I have just finished the careful perusal of your admirable book 'Arabia' in the concluding prayer of which I heartily join. I am sure that we all have to thank you for so wide-spread an account of Arabia and its surrounding, and the various peoples and institutions connected with it.¹⁶²

In this work Zwemer lays down his vision of mission for Arabia and its fulfilment. He argued for the distribution of Christian scriptures as a channel of indirect proclamation of the gospel; As well as 'medical mission' as a means of breaking down misconceptions of Christian mission for the overall aim of evangelism.¹⁶³

Through Zwemer's lifelong study of Islam we can discern development in his writings which could be categorized in two stages: the earlier and the mature Zwemer. The former (1890-1915/16) is one that is greatly influenced by a 19th-century outlook; Christianity as above other religions and Islam as a singular stronghold that needed to be torn down.¹⁶⁴ The mature Zwemer (1915-1938) is one that engages with Muslims sympathetically as individuals while being critical of Islam as a religious system in light of its theology and 'belief'.¹⁶⁵ The shift is due to the view of Muslims as individuals and believing that Christian preaching is addressed to 'man in his need' and not an address to the religious system of Islam. Werff discerns different factors for the shift in Zwemer's outlook such as ground work in the Muslim world, encounters with evangelistically-minded Islamic scholars and the crisis of theology and mission current at the time. While upholding that Islam is inherently defective, Zwemer's position became more 'Christocentric' hoping to guide enlightened Muslims to the salvation found in Christ. Moreover, his use of language concerning Islam started to change gradually from one of 'conflict' to one of the 'love of Jesus' and 'challenge of faith'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 195.

¹⁶² Cited in Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 194.

¹⁶³ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle*, 5-6.

¹⁶⁴ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 315.

¹⁶⁵ Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 235-6. Goddard, *A history of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 124.

¹⁶⁶ Hubers, 'Samuel Zwemer and the Challenge of Islam', 117. Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 250-1. Hubers, 'Samuel Zwemer and the challenge of Islam: From Polemic to a Hint of Dialogue'.

3.5.1. Moslem World

Moreover, as a means of informing the church in the west, Zwemer founded and edited *The Moslem World* (now *the Muslim world*) journal in 1911. This had the overall aim of promoting the urgent nature of evangelism and a better presentation of Islam as a religion and way of life.¹⁶⁷ He carefully selected leading Islamic Scholars and those active in missions to Muslims as contributors such as Marshall Broomhall, James S. Dennis, Rev W. H. T. Gairdner, Dr Johannes Lepsius, Dr Julius Richter, Dr W. St. Clair Tisdall, H. U. Weitbrecht, Rev E. M. Wherry, and Rev Friedrich Wurz.¹⁶⁸ The journal was not to be founded on denominational lines but rather to uphold Christian ecumenism through the ‘unity of the faith in the bond of peace and righteousness of life.’¹⁶⁹ The journal has had great impact in the manner in which the western world perceives Islam¹⁷⁰ and has become a ground-breaking foundation for future studies on Islam from a western perspective.

On the editorial of the first issue of the *Moslem World* Zwemer’s academic dedication is apparent in his assertion that Christians would be active in academic study of Islam: its belief and practice.¹⁷¹ He edited the *Journal* for thirty-six years and his commitment to his work is reflected in the fact that there was never a time when an issue failed to materialise during his editorship. Interestingly the journal has been in the forefront in education in the West in the nature of Islam and the Muslim world into the twenty-first century. Warren Larson has pointed out in 2007 that the journal at present has lost the spirit of its pioneer, given that Zwemer passed over the responsibility of editorial at Hartford Seminary only if they were willing to keep his vision for Muslim evangelism at the heart of their agenda. However, *The Moslem World* contrary to Zwemer’s intention

¹⁶⁷ Zwemer, *Moslem World* 1.1., 1-4. 180. Montrose, *Christian Mission and Islam*, 12,86. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes*, 40. Abdullah O. Al-Abdulkareem views the editorial work of *The Muslim World* to be one sided and not truly representative of Islam. Al-Abdulkareem, *Images of Islam in Samuel M. Zwemer’s The Moslem world Quarterly, 1911-1947*. For a full presentation of Zwemer’s books see bibliography.

¹⁶⁸ Zwemer, ‘Editorial’ *Moslem World* 1.1 , 2-4. Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 342.

¹⁶⁹ Zwemer, *Moslem World* 1.1., 1-4.

¹⁷⁰ Montrose, *Christian Missions and Islam*, 3.

¹⁷¹ Zwemer, ‘Editorial’ *Moslem World* 1.1 , 2-4.

was diverted into an academically centred journal departing further from its root of mission and evangelism.¹⁷²

3.5.2. View of Islam

As we have discerned positive development in Zwemer's view of Muslims, it is clear that he has adopted a 'confrontational approach' in his engagement with the religion of Islam believing that there is no continuity between Islam and Christianity.¹⁷³ The 'confrontational' school we have explored in chapter 2 was of great influence in shaping his outlook of Islam and its lack of partaking in the divine plan of salvation. While believing that the days of Islam is numbers, which will lead into a transformation and the age of renaissance of the Islamic world.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Zwemer viewed Islam as an oppressive religion especially to women and children, not paralleled by other religious traditions. He added that the Islamic law of divorce was a corrupting influence on children growing up in such an environment and led to the denigration of the sanctity of marriage. The solution, as he put it, is the gospel of Christ which brings a transformation for those who encounter it.¹⁷⁵ Zwemer's adaptation of the 'confrontation' school view of Islamic scripture and Muhammad should not be interpreted as a criticism directed at Muslims. Rather, we discern the opposite, since diplomacy was an important part of his mission, as is made apparent in his journey to South Africa in 1925, whereby Christian-Muslim relations were carried out through the invitation of Muslims for such a purpose; this was of great media interest at the time.¹⁷⁶ It is important to point out that, Zwemer's made a clear distinction between Islam and its followers; while on the one hand he rejected the religion on the other hand he welcomed and showed warmth to Muslims.

¹⁷² Larson, 'Editorial'.

¹⁷³ Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 124.

¹⁷⁴ Zwemer, *Islam, A Challenge to Faith*, 210-13, 225. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 63.

¹⁷⁵ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 143.

¹⁷⁶ Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, 106

3.6. Conclusion

Zwemer lived and breathed 'mission' as is evidenced in his life commitment to Muslim evangelism. His pietist upbringing and conservative seminary training had been a significant factor in shaping his views regarding non-Christian religions. Zwemer's view of Islam and his missionary undertakings to Muslims had been moulded greatly by missionaries, Orientalists and Islamic scholars. Most importantly, his encounter with Islam brought forth a confrontational style in his writings believing that the two faiths possess inherently irreconcilable theological differences. We can discern a development in Zwemer's thinking from the 19th century triumphalistic view of Mission to one of a mature outlook whereby Muslims are perceived as individuals in search of God. However, one of the main reservations for Zwemer's assertion of the lack of salvation in Islam was in its rejection of the means of salvation found in Christ. This is in the light of the Quranic rejection of the New Testament Jesus who was divine, was crucified and died on the cross. However, his objection to Islam was not limited to soteriological grounds but included social and ethical reasons. In particular, he emphasised the manner in which the mistreatment of women and children was due to the oppressive nature of Islam.

Zwemer was convinced that mission was needed and wanted the church to participate in this great work through united cooperation outside Protestantism and with the greater Christian body. This is made apparent in the broad participation of contributors in *The Moslem World*. In doing this, rather than bring disunity based on fragile theological grounds, he argued for greater collaboration between the churches for the overall aim of effective Muslim evangelism. By no means did Zwemer view mission as an imperialistic enterprise nor as an effort in enlightening uncivilized people. Rather, the heart of his mission was to bring Muslims to faith in Christ and make them Christian while he undertook humanitarian engagement in order to work towards such a goal.

Despite Zwemer's evangelistic outlook his contribution to the study of Muslims and the Islamic World should not be underestimated. He did not study Islam as simply an academic discipline nor out of interest in the religion by itself. We can discern that

Zwemer's main concern was people; the study of Islam was a means of reaching Muslims, which derives from the view that the heart of the proclamation of the gospel was engagement with the individual. This is made apparent in his study of popular Islam despite its diversion from Islamic orthodoxy, while at the time such study was neglected from a western perspective. Most importantly, as a result of his ground-breaking work, more than 80 missionaries followed his footsteps to Arabia during his lifetime. There have been hospitals, missionary schools, scripture distribution and the establishment of missionary societies. This is in addition to the missionary conferences in Cairo and Lucknow which brought forth *The Moslem World* journals, the Nile Mission Press, the Henry Martyn School (India) and much more during his lifetime.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, it could be asserted that Zwemer's vision of making an impact in the Islamic world is one that has been partially fulfilled.

¹⁷⁷ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 141-142.

4. Zwemer's Originality with Muhammad

4.1. Introduction

*What think ye of Mohammed?*¹⁷⁸

The above question was one which Zwemer tried to address in the course of his life because this is the pivotal point raised at major junctions where Christianity meets Islam. Unlike Jens Christensen, a contemporary missionary to Muslims, who totally avoided such a topic on the ground that it is of no relevance to the Christian missionary endeavour among Muslims,¹⁷⁹ Zwemer would say otherwise. He would affirm, despite ample contemporary western and Muslim studies on Muhammad, that there was illiteracy concerning the true moral character of the Prophet of Islam.¹⁸⁰ He believed there is a difficulty in the study of the Arabian Prophet, concerning his moral character as portrayed in the traditions. According to him it is irreconcilable with the 'moral sense' as preached in Christianity.¹⁸¹ In this chapter we will explore the manner in which Zwemer defends such a claim. He takes a theme-based approach in his dealings with Muhammad, as opposed to a chronological overview of the life of the prophet of Islam. We will explore Zwemer's stance on Muhammad by applying a range of criteria in order to judge his prophetic nature; also by comparing him to Christ. First we will have an overview of Zwemer's view of Muhammad.

4.2. Zwemer's View of Muhammad

Zwemer pinpointed the ambiguity of the exact date of the birth of Muhammad. However, he felt it would be relatively reasonable to date his birth to the 20th of August 570A.D. or

¹⁷⁸ Zwemer, *The Cross Above the Crescent*, 59.

¹⁷⁹ Jens Christensen, *Mission to Islam and Beyond*, 347.

¹⁸⁰ Zwemer, *Islam: a Challenge to Faith*, vii, 42.

¹⁸¹ Zwemer, *The Cross Above the Crescent*, 62.

the 13th of April 571A.D. In looking at the early life of Muhammad he follows traditional Muslim accounts of such events: the death of his father before his birth, being taken care of by his grandfather and then looked after by his uncle. He married Khadijah at the age of twenty five whilst it is fifteen years later that Muhammad ‘gave his mind to contemplation’¹⁸². Zwemer follows that it is in the cave of *Hira* that Muhammad was called to prophethood, in the year 622 A.D., ‘after Mohammed determined to flee from Mecca to Medina, and this flight dates the Moslem era’.¹⁸³

For Zwemer the *Hijra* of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina was decisive, given that his message changed dramatically from one of obedience to God to one that emphasised the obeying of the apostle along with the sender of the revelation. Zwemer stated in *Islam: a Challenge to Faith* (1907) – *Islam* from now on:

The flight to Medina changed not only the scene, but the actor and drama. He who at Mecca was the preacher and warner, now becomes the legislator and warrior. This is evident from the Koran chapters revealed after the Hegira.¹⁸⁴

Interestingly, such a dual attitude is discernable with Muir’s outlook of Muhammad. While the earlier role and mission of the Prophet of Islam was attractive to him, he believed things turned to the worse after the *Hijra*. This led Muir to affirm how:

[h]appy would it have been for the memory of the Arabian Prophet, if his career had terminated with his flight from Mecca... if he acted under a supernatural guidance [at Medina], that guidance proceeded from no pure and holy source. Ambition, rapine, assassination, lust, are the undenied features of his later life, openly sanctioned by the assumed permission, sometimes even by the express command of the Most high!¹⁸⁵

One of Zwemer’s earliest works on Muhammad is found in *Arabia: Cradle of Islam* (1900); while writing a survey of Arabia he found it fitting to have a section on the Islamic Prophet. Yet, it is seven years later in *Islam* that we find in-depth analyses of such a topic. In *Mohammed and Christ* (1915) Zwemer explores Muhammad in

¹⁸² Zwemer, *Arabia, The Cradle of Islam*, 34-36.

¹⁸³ Zwemer, *Arabia, The Cradle of Islam*, 34-36.

¹⁸⁴ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 36; *Heirs of The Prophet*, 27. In Bennett’s study of *Victorian Images of Islam* (1992) he explores different individuals of the 19th century and sees whether he perceived Muhammad to be sincere or not. His findings indicate that such a view was not held in uniformity across the board, but rather individuals such as Forster and Bosworth Smith would advocate the sincerity of the Islamic Prophet. Yet, Muir and Tisdall would advocate the lack of sincerity within Muhammad.

¹⁸⁵ Muir, *The Life of Mahomet Vol 2*, 95.

comparison with Christ. It is almost thirty five years later in *The Cross Above the Crescent* that we find new insight into the Prophet of Islam. Actually Zwemer addresses the topic of Muhammad in almost all his books in a repetitive manner. Interestingly, unlike Zwemer, Muir dedicated volumes of his work to assessment on Muhammad – *The Life of Mahomet and History of Islam to The Era of the Hegira*, 4 vols (1858-1862).

The problem we face in the examination of Zwemer's outlook of Muhammad is the limitation of such in-depth study in his work. For Zwemer, such study was one important topic among other topics of relevance in the study of Islam. However, it is clear that undertaking such study is of great importance because of Zwemer's legacy in the Christian study of Islam and his lasting influence on the present-day evangelical outlook of the Prophet of Islam. Zwemer was a missionary to the Muslim world and life-long student of Islam; Zwemer addressed the prophet of Islam because of his centrality for Muslims. He considered that Islamic belief and practice do not originate uniquely from the Quran, but rather the *sunna* of Muhammad, as depicted in Muslim traditions, to the point that the religion reflects characteristics of the prophet of Islam. Zwemer believed that 'The religion which Mohammed founded bears everywhere the imprint of his life and character. Mohammed was not only the prophet, but the prophecy of Islam.'¹⁸⁶

In an academic quest for studying Islam, Zwemer would point out the importance of starting with its Prophet, because Muhammad not only pointed to the monotheistic conception of God but also claimed his own apostleship. Zwemer would have interpreted this to be nothing short of the religion formed in the image of its Prophet. In the sections which follow, we will see in greater depth why Zwemer gave such great importance to Muhammad in his interpretation of Islam.

Zwemer was not just familiar with biographical work on Muhammad but also, as the editor of *The Moslem World*, he was familiar with the contemporary scholarship on Muhammad. The majority of scholars who contributed articles to the journal, would have taken a critical approach to the traditional Muslim portrayal of Muhammad. Among them

¹⁸⁶ Zwemer, *Arabia, The Cradle of Islam*, 52; *Moslem World*, 25.

were Professor Joseph Horowitz describing the development of the legend of Muhammad (Vol. 10/1920: p.49), G. W. Broomfield's study of his psychology (Vol. 16/1926: p.37), W. Temple Gairdner's description of the life of Muhammad through the eyes of tradition (Vol. 9/1919: p.25), and Arthur Jeffery's historical survey of a scholarly interpretation of Muhammad (Vol. 16/1926: p.327). While Frank H. Foster's attempted to reconstruct the life of Muhammad uniquely through Koranic accounts (Vol. 26/1936: p.130).

4.4 Zwemer's Evaluation of Muhammad

We have reflected on Zwemer's view of the mission of Muhammad. We turn now to Zwemer's evaluation; (1) employing three criteria; (2) comparing with Christ; (3) and examining violence in the life of Muhammad.

4.4.1. Muhammad Examined Through Three Criteria

Zwemer employs three criteria for measuring Muhammad's legitimacy as a prophet; he adds that a minimum of two would be a legitimate test for a prophetic calling. These are: (a) the contemporary law of the Arabs; (b) the law as brought by Muhammad; (c) and the Christian scriptures. Zwemer argued that:

It is possible to measure the prophet by three standards, of which two at least would seem to be a fair test: The law of the Pagan Arabs, the law he himself professed to reveal, and the law of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁸⁷

a) Pagan Arab's Code of Conduct:

In looking at the law of the time, Zwemer affirms that contemporary Arab raiders of Muhammad's time had their own code of conduct which the Prophet of Islam himself fails to keep. As he saw it: 'The Arabs among whom Mohammed was born and grew to

¹⁸⁷ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 42.

manhood also had a law, although they were idolaters, slave-holders and polygamists.¹⁸⁸ He gave the example of the robbery of pilgrims to Mecca which was considered unlawful, unlike that of robbing the traders by contemporary bandits. In addition, the law of the time permitted the marriage of a captive three months after her husband's death. However, Muhammad broke such laws; as far as the later law is concerned he slept with Sofia – who was a prisoner of war – after only three days. As Zwemer saw it, Muhammad broke such laws of the time on the ground that he had come with a special revelation to validate such action which further tainted his 'character'. Zwemer would put it as following:

It was quite lawful to marry a captive woman whose relatives had been slain in battle, but not until three months after their death. Mohammed only waited three days in the case of the Jewess Safia [Sofia]. It was lawful to rob merchants but not pilgrims on their way to Mecca. Mohammed broke this old law and "revealed a verse" to justify his conduct.¹⁸⁹

It is clear that Zwemer has interpreted the ordeal of Muhammad with Sofia in a different light to that of Muir. Muir narrates the story by showing the special treatment Sofia received before the eyes of Muhammad who takes her as his wife and not a prisoner of war (he 'cast his mantle around her, in token that she was to be his own').¹⁹⁰ One could suppose that Zwemer is not dependent on Muir in his interpretation of Muhammad's incidence with Sofia but rather would take a different angle in order to strengthen his argument that Muhammad falls short in being examined by the law of the time.

On such a matter, Tor Julius Efraim Andrae (1885-1947), Bishop in the church of Sweden and scholar of religions, was of the view that a legitimate criteria in judging the genuine nature of Muhammad has to be by comparing him with sixth-century Arabia as a means of having a fair assessment. He argues that '[w]e cannot judge the Prophet of Islam according to our [Christian] moral standards, but only according to the standards which he [Muhammad] himself recognized [which was the law of the time].'¹⁹¹

Unlike Zwemer who takes in to account the law of Muhammad's time, Andrae doesn't go in details to explain his claim. He rather glosses over the matter at the expense of

¹⁸⁸ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 182.

¹⁸⁹ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 182-3.

¹⁹⁰ Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 3rd ed., 365-366.

¹⁹¹ Andrae, *Mohammed*, 188.

presenting a favourable portrayal of Muhammad of history, i.e. he does not look in depth as to whether or not Muhammad did in fact keep up with the law of the time.

Perhaps Zwemer uses such criterion in order to put Muhammad in his historical context. In this way, it would be possible to establish whether or not he was a moral person before examining him through the Islamic law.

b) The Law established by Muhammad himself:

Secondly, Zwemer suggest that Muhammad does not fulfil his own law. For example he exceeded the limits of 'up to four wives', as sanctioned in Surah 4:3, but marrying thirteen by claiming special revelation uniquely for himself. Zwemer would have found it appropriate for Muhammad to uphold the standard he claimed through revelation. The reason for Muhammad's exemption from following his own revelation is a further sign for Zwemer that his revelation was not from God. Zwemer is not unique in objecting that special revelation followed the wrongdoing of Muhammad; this has been a source of great reflection for those studying such subjects.¹⁹²

In this instance, Zwemer's use of Islamic law as a criterion could be perceived to be an attempt to judge Muhammad in his own environment. Zwemer did not necessarily give approval to the authoritative nature of Muhammad's revelations but he used Islamic law and law of the time as a measure of suitability for Muhammad.

Zwemer did not see Islamic law as having any authority, but rather perceives it to be of a low standard and a degrading system. For a start, Zwemer would have upheld the orthodox Christian outlook of marriage of one man with one woman. Hence, would have rejected the Quranic allowance of up to four wives, especially when seen in a negative light – Muhammad's marriage to thirteen wives. In such a matter, Tor Andrea would state otherwise and argue that Muhammad consistently followed what he considered being a divine edict since he 'faithfully observed his own restrictions and that he sought to

¹⁹² Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face*, 113.

control intemperate license in sexual matters by legislation.’¹⁹³ From this, we can deduce that Tor Andrea approaches such matters in a positive light, and this is apparent in his argument that Muhammad tried to bring transformation from within as opposed to breaking a social structure by putting into practice what he preached. Yet, similar to what we have seen above we find that Tor Andrea fails to address Muhammad’s inconsistency in having fallen short with the standard he prescribed to others. Such scrutiny was one that Zwemer found unavoidable in his examination of the prophet of Islam according to Islamic law.

It is clear that there is a strong divergence between Tor Andrea and Zwemer, given that the former would see the law of the time and Islamic law to be a legitimate standard in examining Muhammad, believing that he meets such standard. The latter would argue otherwise because the use of such criteria would leave Muhammad wanting. Interestingly, in commenting on Andrae’s outlook, Zwemer objected that such undertaking was a rereading of the historical Muhammad by stating that the ‘earliest extant biography of Mohammed by Ibn Hisham (died 834 A.D.) tells too much for us to accept without question, *all* the shades of the portrait painted by the scholarly artist of Upsala (Andrae).’¹⁹⁴ Yet, despite such great diversion between such individuals we find great uniformity when it comes to examining Muhammad with the standard of Christ as we will see in section 4.4.2.

Moreover, Zwemer uses the Quran in his examination of Islamic law to critique Muhammad’s prophethood. He will in turn question the consistent nature of such law in lacking the moral framework in its claim of divine origin. That is to say, Zwemer emphasises that Muhammad did not keep up with his own revelation but, rather, found the special privilege given him unconvincing. We should add that, Zwemer’s main concern would be to examine Muhammad through the Christian scripture, and the use of the Quran would be nothing more than to serve the overall purpose of being a signing post to Christ. As a Christian missionary to Muslims, Zwemer would have considered the

¹⁹³ Andrae, *Mohammed*, 190.

¹⁹⁴ Zwemer, ‘Tor Andrae’s Muhammed’, MW, 221.

Bible as authoritative as opposed to the Quran; therefore, in turn, his evaluation of Muhammad would be from a Christian perspective.

c) The OT and NT as a Criteria:

Zwemer condemned Muhammad in falling short of the standard of *The Ten Commandments* as found in *The Old Testament*. He gave the example of Muhammad marriage to Zainab who was the wife of his adopted son, which could be categorised as coveting one's neighbour's wife. As Zwemer saw it 'Mohammed fell in love with the lawful wife [Zainab] of his adopted son, Zeid, prevailed on him to divorce her, and then married her immediately.'¹⁹⁵ Judging from the New Testament, Muhammad falls short of the standard as taught by Jesus Christ in *the Sermon on the Mount*.¹⁹⁶

Zwemer is not unique in raising such objections. Thomas Patrick Hughes (1838-1911), a missionary with CMS in an earlier part of his life and one that wrote significant works such as *Dictionary of Islam* (1885), finds it appropriate to judge Muhammad against the Christian scriptures generally, and Christ particularly – the latter will be looked at further on section 4.4.2. He believed that such a yardstick was one proposed by the Arabian prophet himself. Along with Hughes we find Tisdall repeats the objection that the life of Muhammad is found wanting by drawing a comparison with figures of the Old Testament, particularly that of David's affair with Bathsheba and Muhammad's dealing with Zainab. For the former, the climax of Muhammad's wrong doing – contrary to David –was the lack of repentance for his 'sin'. Given this, Muhammad justified his wrongdoing by claiming to have received a command of divine edict. Hughes explains:

Objection has often been made to the manner in which Christian divines have attacked the private character of Muhammad. Why reject the prophetic mission of Muhammad on account of his private vices, when you receive as inspiration the sayings of a Balaam, a David or a Solomon?... But in the case of Muhammad his professed inspiration sanctioned and encouraged his own vices. That which ought to have been the fountain of purity was, in fact, the cover of the Prophet's depravity. But how different it is in the case of the true prophet David, where, in the words of inspiration, he lays bare to public gaze the enormity of his own crimes.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 43.

¹⁹⁶ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 182. *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 42.

¹⁹⁷ Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 398.

While for Muhammad such occurrence has brought a lasting stain not limited to the Prophet of Islam but the religion itself. Tisdall explains by asserting that ‘how far in this matter Islam falls behind the morality of the Jews even in the times of the Kings, is well seen by comparing what the Bible says of David's adultery with Bathsheba, and what the Qur'an says of that of Muhammad with Zeinab.’¹⁹⁸ From what we have seen we can deduce that Zwemer’s assessment of Muhammad through the Christian scripture, particularly the Old Testament, would focus on *the ten commandments*. However, Tisdall and Hughes would highlight that Muhammad’s wrongdoing can be compared with figures of the Old Testament, yet, what makes him unique is his lack of repentance for his ‘sins’.

Zwemer’s primary reason in judging the Prophet of Islam with the Christian scripture is based in the belief that Muhammad founded his prophetic calling on the assumption that he is foretold in earlier ‘revelations’: Muhammad ‘professed to approve and supersede’ the Old and the New Testament.¹⁹⁹ In Zwemer’s view, Christian Scripture was foundational for Muhammad’s claim of divine commission, yet Zwemer does not go into detail by looking at the Quran or hadith to solidify such an assertion. Zwemer could have been alluding to Surah 7:157 where it is asserted that Muhammad is the one that has been foretold in the older scriptures. Yet Zwemer’s assertion would raise further questions, such as, did Muhammad encounter the Christian scripture or was his encounter of biblical sources from unorthodox sources. One example we could give is of the Quranic interpretation of the doctrine of the trinity as being nothing short of tritheism which encompasses Mary within the Godhead – Surah 4:167-70. Likewise, for Hughes, Christian scripture plays an important part in Muhammad’s mission, whilst highlighting that the prophet of Islam’s dealing was one that distorted biblical ‘truth’. He explains that:

[W]hilst he [Muhammad] has adopted and avowed his belief in the sacred books of the Jew and the Christian, and has given them all the stamp and currency which his authority

¹⁹⁸ Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent*, 62.

¹⁹⁹ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 42.

and influence could impart, he has attempted to rob Christianity of every distinctive truth which it possesses.²⁰⁰

For Zwemer, as with Hughes, by bringing to the fore the lack of Muhammad's foretelling in the earlier revelation – which is foundational in establishing the genuine nature of their religion for Muslims - they attempted to question further his prophetic credentials. But, rather, they assert that the prophet of Islam uses the Christian scripture as a platform for his newly-founded religion. One should highlight that such similarity of outlook between Zwemer and Hughes is not coincidental but rather could be attributed to influence. That is to say, Hughes' article from the *Dictionary of Islam* (1885) which reflects on Muhammad's use of the Christian scripture, entitled 'the character of Muhammad', is of great importance.

Most importantly, for Zwemer, the message of Muhammad would have been considered to be contradictory to the message of the New Testament; in turn, he would have questions regarding its being from the same origin in lacking consistency with prior revelations. Such argument can be discerned in Martyn's and Pfander's assessments of the legitimacy of the prophetic nature of Muhammad. While the former would question Muhammad's prophetic self-consciousness vis-à-vis Christian scripture, he added that the Prophet of Islam was lacking in fulfilling the revelation he proposed to bring.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, Pfander approach is to emphasise the lack of foretelling of Muhammad's coming in the Old and New Testament.²⁰² Zwemer would approach the matter differently, given that his use of the Christian scripture in examining the prophet of Islam would be to highlight that it is from such source that Muhammad claimed authority for his mission. In addition, Zwemer would argue that, as opposed to fulfilling the law as found in the Old and New Testaments, Muhammad brought about degrading laws which sanctioned polygamy, divorce at will and slavery, while adding that:

²⁰⁰ Hughes, *Notes on Muhammadanism*, 5.

²⁰¹ Martyn, *Controversial Tract on*, 106.

²⁰² Pfander, *Balance of Truth*.

[These] three evils are so closely intertwined with the Mohammedan religionist – its book and its Prophet – that they can never be wholly abandoned without doing violence to the teaching of the Koran and the example of Mohammed.²⁰³

Slaves in Islam

While looking at slavery in Islam Zwemer believes that it is sanctioned in the Quran and when every attempt has been made to abolish such a practice it has been halted due to its being *contra* Quranic revelation.²⁰⁴ While Zwemer does not present a Quranic reference we find passages which agree with his premise, such as Surah 33:50 and 23:5, where Muslims are divinely approved to take prisoners of war as slaves. In reflecting on the hadith Zwemer turns to Mishkat al-Masabih as an authoritative source to argue such practice of keeping slaves as exemplified in the life of Muhammad.²⁰⁵ Zwemer's concern regarding such practice is significant, in view of the fact that slavery was still practiced at large in his encounter with the Muslim world when writing *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (1907); it was here that he found it problematic. Interestingly, at present, the situation has changed a great deal. Despite Zwemer's assessment, laws have been passed for the abolishment of slavery. Yet had Zwemer been writing in the present era he would have pointed out that such degrading practices are still practised in southern Sudan. Interestingly, in Zwemer's assessment of such a topic we don't discern reflection of the manner in which eradication of slavery is possible in Muslim society; this makes us realize that Zwemer's evaluation was more descriptive than prescriptive. Bosworth Smith would take a different approach in looking at the role Muhammad played regarding the presence of slavery in Islam. He acknowledges that slavery was practised at large in the Moslem world. Yet contrary to Zwemer Smith asserts that such custom goes contrary to the example of Muhammad. He points out that Muslims 'who still indulge in it [the Slave Trade] that it forms no part of their creed, that it is opposed alike to the practice and precept of their Prophet.'²⁰⁶ However, Bosworth Smith's lack of the use of either Islamic scripture or the example of Muhammad to solidify his argument leaves us unconvinced. His assertion could be viewed to be nothing short of a sweeping statement in an effort to

²⁰³ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 126.

²⁰⁴ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 128.

²⁰⁵ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 128.

²⁰⁶ Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, xi.

portray Muhammad in a positive light at the expense of presenting a realistic portrayal of Muhammad. This is contrary to Zwemer's use of primary sources in his effort to show a much more accurate depiction of the prophet of Islam.

In brief, we have seen that, Zwemer examines Muhammad by employing three different authorities as seen by Christians, Muslims and the moral structure of the day, to judge his illegitimacy as a prophet. We have also observed the strong emphasis that the revelation unique to Muhammad was nothing more than license to sin. Surprisingly, as one who would defend the finality of the Old and New Testament, one would ask whether Zwemer was implying other revelations along side the Christian Scriptures. Moreover, had Muhammad fulfilled the latter two of such criteria, would Zwemer have considered him a legitimate prophet of God? It could be that Zwemer adopted such an approach believing that the Christian scripture would not have been available in Arabic.

In conclusion, Zwemer would question the action of Muhammad by the use of such criteria, yet he found unconvincing the special revelation given to Muhammad to be the grounds for his superseding the 'revelation' he claimed to bring. Hence, we can assert that, Zwemer was not at ease with what seems to be a double standard. That is, one law for the Muslims and another for Muhammad or, rather, the lack of such a law for him, in what could be interpreted as not being restricted to the Arabian prophet. In such instances Zwemer could have been alluding to Surah 33:49-50 where Muhammad is given special revelation where he could override the restriction he imposed on others by asserting superior status. In such matter, we should add that, Zwemer would have been of the view that the Quranic passage which gives justification for Muhammad to supersede the limitation of four wives to be nothing short of his own fabrication to justify his own sinful desires. To this we should add that his use of such criteria should not be any surprise, in view of the fact that Muhammad's claim of universal prophethood would in turn require the strongest critic as a means of solidifying such assertion. Such objection was raised by John Gilchrist, a Christian apologist and an Islamic scholar, when he asserted that Muhammad 'openly projected himself as a universal messenger to the whole

of mankind... [such] universal leadership and example and, in making them, he must be judged by absolute standards.²⁰⁷

Whilst looking at such criteria in closer detail, we find that it is not surprising that Zwemer would look at the law of the Arabs or the Islamic law to judge Muhammad's legitimacy as a prophet. This is on the grounds that the former would have been encountered by Muhammad in Arabia and could be seen as the starting point from which a standard could be set in putting Muhammad in his historical context. In addition, the later, a logical criterion, was a standard he proscribed to all. In such instance, we may ask why Zwemer limited himself with these criteria, in view of the fact that he was willing to use sources which he by no means considered of authority; Islamic Law and the law of the time. It would have been equally legitimate for him to use Talmudic or Zoroastrian sources for the goal of bringing in to question Muhammad's prophethood. This is in light of the fact that Zwemer considered Muhammad to have borrowed from both sources along with others in formulating Islam, as we will see in section 5.7. In addition, Zwemer's use of the Christian scripture to examine Muhammad could be considered to be unconvincing on the ground that it is the equivalent of asserting that two irreconcilable truth claims uphold one and the same.

However, Zwemer's use of such criterion was not from the Christian point of view of examining the true nature of a prophet but rather Muhammad claimed had been foretold in previous revelations; the Old and New Testaments. Although examining Muhammad through the standard of the Christian scripture would have been a natural outworking for Zwemer, nevertheless, Zwemer used such an approach due to the fact that Muhammad claimed that he was foretold in former revelations. At this point, we could deduce that Zwemer leaves no room for the possibility of labelling Muhammad a prophet since he has been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Moreover, Tisdall and Hughes would find it fitting to use the Christian scripture in examining the genuine nature of Muhammad, while Tor Andrae would advocate the use of the law of the time as well as Islamic law in

²⁰⁷ Gilchrist, *Muhammad: The Prophet of Islam*, 60.

such examination. However, with Zwemer, we find that he uses all criteria in examining the genuine nature of Muhammad; this could be categorized as his original approach.

In judging by the standard of the Old Testament prophets or the New Testament perception of one that equips the Church for the service of God (Ephesians 4:11-12) Zwemer would have found Muhammad lacking. It is not surprising that Zwemer would find Islam's Prophet lacking in assessment through the Christian scriptures, yet it is by a comparison with Christ that he finds greater divergence.

4.4.2. Muhammad Compared with Christ

In our effort to explore Zwemer's originality regarding Muhammad we will form a dialogue partner with his contemporaries' endeavour of comparing Muhammad with Christ by firstly looking at the way Zwemer himself engaged with such topic. We find that he uses the teaching of *the Sermon on the Mount* as a decisive factor to assess the prophetic nature of Muhammad, Zwemer asserts that an examination of his life through earlier sources would confirm he broke every aspect of Christ's teachings.²⁰⁸

Interestingly, Zwemer would go as far as to affirm that Muslims have tried and found wanting the fulfilment of their deepest desires in Muhammad; he does this by giving the example of Al-Ghazali, who bases his greatest moral teachings on Christ as opposed to Muhammad. Zwemer states that:

It is noteworthy that when he (Al-Ghazali) rises to the highest ethical teaching he bases his remarks on the sayings (mostly apocryphal) of Christ.... Al-Ghazali tried hard but failed to find in Mohammed the ideals of his own heart. This is the tragedy of Islam.²⁰⁹

Al-Ghazali was one individual that had a positive impact on Zwemer, to the point that he wrote *A Moslem Seeker After God: Life of Al-Ghazali* (1921) while calling Al-Ghazali

²⁰⁸ Zwemer, *Islam a challenge to Faith*, 42.

²⁰⁹ Zwemer, *Moslem Seeker After God*, 218.

‘the greatest of all Moslem theologians.’²¹⁰ The significance of such work is that it is the first book dedicated to the study of a Muslim thinker by Zwemer. As a lifelong student of Islam, one would expect Zwemer to undertake a work dedicated uniquely to its Prophet as opposed to Al-Ghazali. While we should not read too much into this, we question whether, as a pietist Christian, Zwemer found Al-Ghazali’s mystical expression of the divine something to relate to.

In the analyses of the Prophet of Islam by the standard of Christ, Zwemer insists that either Muhammad was not fully aware of orthodox Christology or he wilfully misrepresented such doctrine by claiming that he ascended into paradise in order to give himself an exalted position in his newly-founded faith. Zwemer wrote:

[Muhammad] did not use, or would not use, the channel of knowledge opened by the Incarnation. Instead of learning from Him who *descended* from heaven, Mohammed asserted that he himself *ascended* to heaven and there had intercourse with God.²¹¹

In addition he argued that the Prophet of Islam was not in favour of the message of the cross but detested its very shape that ‘he broke everything brought into his house with that figure upon it’.²¹² For such reasons, Zwemer would have found problematic the fulfilment or surpassing nature of Muhammad vis-à-vis the clear denial of the cross of Christ which is at the heart of the Christian gospel. In addition, titles understood in Christian tradition to speak of Christ had been illegitimately given to Muhammad, such as ‘Light of God, Peace of the World, Glory of the Ages’ and that he ‘dwells in the highest heaven and is several degrees above Jesus in honor and station’.²¹³

Now turning to Zwemer’s contemporaries, we will be looking at those who were in agreement with him, that is, the Muhammad depicted by Muslims is one that replaces Christ; namely Tisdall, Koelle and Hughes, as it was a point of concern for many evangelically minded student of Islam. We will also consider Tor Andrea who

²¹⁰ Zwemer, *Moslem Seeker After God*, 218.

²¹¹ Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, 109-10.

²¹² Zwemer, *The Cross Above the Crescent*, 46.

²¹³ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 185.

discourages such comparison. Now looking at the individuals and their objection that the Muhammad depicted by Muslims as one who replaced Christ we start with Tisdall. We find that he portrayed Muhammad as having been given a place of exaltation above that of Christ. He asserts that ‘Muhammadan writers have invented marvellous legends about Muhammad's birth, his miracles, his sayings and doings, and even his death, which are all in imitation of those of Christ Jesus... [in order] to exalt their Master far above Christ.’ This led him to conclude that: ‘the “Prophet” as now honoured by all Muslims ... [is the] most unmistakable Antichrist’.²¹⁴

Tisdall would interpret the exaltation of Muhammad by Muslims as being imitating Christ; it is for such reason he would go as far as calling Muhammad the ‘anti-Christ’ in having taken the place of Christ. Interestingly, it is important to bring to our attention that the term ‘anti-Christ’ is not limited to mean one who is against but rather could be interpreted to mean in the place of Christ. It is for such a reason that we can witness parallelism between Tisdall and Zwemer’s assessments of Muhammad as being one that takes the place of Christ. As we have seen, Zwemer perceived that Muhammad takes the place of Christ, to which it could be argued that Zwemer was in full agreement with Tisdall’s depiction of Muhammad as an ‘antichrist’ despite the fact that Zwemer is reserved in the use of such terminology in such an endeavour.

Likewise, Koelle’s comparison would focus on Muhammad’s mission being contrary to that of Christ, as is apparent in the rejection of biblical Christology. He affirmed that Muhammad ‘set himself up as a rival to Christ, boldly denying both His Divine Sonship and His atoning death upon the cross. He thus assumed a directly anti-Christian position, barring the way of his followers to the true and only Mediator between God and man.’²¹⁵ At this point we should note that Zwemer would have agreed with Koelle’s assertion that Muhammad had become a hindrance for Muslims in comprehending the message of Christ apparent in their rejection of the cross. In looking at Hughes we find that he objected strongly to Muhammad’s claim of superseding of the Christian scriptures – as

²¹⁴ Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent*, 218-220.

²¹⁵ Koelle, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, 68.

seen earlier. Yet, it is in judging Muhammad with the standard of Christ that Hughes has his strongest objection. As he put it:

The creed of Muhammad, therefore, claims to supersede that of the Lord Jesus. And it is here that we take our stand... [by stripping] him of his borrowed plumes, and reduc[ing] him to the condition of an impostor!... the inquiring mind sickens at the thought of the beloved, the pure, the lowly Jesus giving place to that of the ambitions, the sensual, the *time-serving* hero of Arabia.²¹⁶

Hughes could have entertained the possibility of labelling Muhammad an important historical figure, yet the very suggestion of him taking a superior status to that of Christ would result in reactionary labelling of Muhammad as being nothing short of an ‘imposter’. Coming back to Zwemer we find that he would have likely agreed with Hughes’ depiction of Muhammad as an ‘imposter’. However, Zwemer would leave the reader to come to their own conclusion as opposed to using such a term. May we add that such an outlook could likewise be compared with Tisdall’s portrayal of Muhammad as the ‘antichrist’; Zwemer would have agreed with such representation yet would fall short of using such terminology.

On the other hand, Tor Andrea found it unfit to draw a parallel between Muhammad and Christ, since such comparison is doomed to fail. He highlights that:

consciously or unconsciously, we Christians are inclined to compare Mohammed with the unsurpassed and exalted figure whom we meet in the Gospels, and that we cannot avoid seeing his historical personality against the background of the perfect moral ideal to which the faith of his followers tried to exalt him. And when it is measured by such a standard, what personality is not found wanting.²¹⁷

Tor Andrea would discourage effort of contrasting Muhammad with that of Christ believing it to be an endeavour of comparing the incomparable. Rather, as seen on section 4.4.1, he would encourage an examination of Muhammad with that of the Islamic law believing that such criterion would be a better fit for the prophet of Islam. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that, contrary to Tor Andrea’s experience, Zwemer along with Koelle, Tisdall and Hughes’ firsthand encounter of the Muslim world could have led to their adaptation of forming a comparison between Muhammad and Christ in an effort to

²¹⁶ Hughes, *Notes on Muhammadanism*, 4-5.

²¹⁷ Andrae, *Mohammed*, 191.

have effective engagement with Muslims. One would suggest that, had Tor Andrea undertaken missionary work among Muslims, his approach in such a matter might have been different for the reason that the effort of making Christ conceivable for Muslims might have naturally led to forming such parallelism.

As this point we should note that the cause of the exalted position given to Muhammad in Islam has been interpreted differently by such individuals. While Koelle and Hughes would accredit Muhammad with such exaltation, Tisdall would state otherwise by identifying such exaltation as being the work of Muslim narrators. Yet, with Zwemer, we find that he incorporates both approaches, since on the one hand he would find Muhammad responsible for the claim of having superseded Christ, on the other hand he blames his followers for the presence of the exalted prophet as found in Islam. Moreover, reflection upon Zwemer's dichotomistic outlook regarding the Muhammad of history and the prophet of faith, as seen earlier, brings to our attention the fact that he would not have been convinced with Muhammad's depiction of his mission as being one that supersedes Christ.

Given this, he would associate the presence of the sinless and 'almost divine' Muhammad as being a later development by Muslims as a means of giving him a place of exaltation. Interestingly, the superior nature of Jesus to that of Muhammad could have been argued from the Islamic scripture in view of the fact that the former is depicted to be sinless whilst the later sinful. Yet, Zwemer would not have taken such approach vis-à-vis the lack of authority he would have given to the Quran. We should highlight that for Zwemer along with Hughes, Koelle and Tisdall's examination of Muhammad was not through magnifying his strengths and playing down his weaknesses but rather from a comparison with the one he claims to supersede: Christ. Such an outlook would be strengthened further by the conviction that God had revealed himself through Christ and subsequent claims of revelation should be consistent with that preached in the Gospels and that Muhammad fails to meet such criteria.

In short, Zwemer explores different scenarios of why he believes Muhammad to have misunderstood or misrepresented the role and mission of Christ. This is in addition to affirming that Muslims have substituted Christ for Muhammad, whereas Muhammad comes up short in the examination of his prophethood when considered through Christian scripture. From this we can deduce that, as a missionary to Muslims, it was inevitable that Zwemer would make some form of comparison between Muhammad and Christ. However, such evaluation will focus on the lack of Islam's Prophet comprehension of the uniqueness of Christ, and the incarnation of his divine origin, in Muhammad's limitation to natural theology. Moreover, the overall assessment of Muhammad would have been negative from the outset. Since, as one who purposes in preaching the Christ-centred message of salvation to Muslims, Zwemer finds Muhammad to be an obstacle as opposed to a bridge for undertaking missionary work in the Muslim world. Such *Christocentric* assessment of Muhammad was not unique to Zwemer but can be discerned with Koelle Tisdall, and Hughes. Given that, as evangelicals, the universality and finality of Christ would have played a decisive role by which to judge any truth claim, the role of Muhammad in salvation history was no exception. Moreover, one important issue that could have played in the mind of such individuals is the appearance of Muhammad after Christ. Such concern is illustrated effectively by Martin Forward when he asserts that 'Islam is a post-Christian phenomenon. From the Christian perspective there is no need of another prophet after the coming of the Son of God'.²¹⁸

In Addition, we can emphasize that, for Zwemer, the lack of Muhammad's divine calling is further strengthened in the contradiction as witnessed with the message of redemption found in Christ believing that the greatest hindrance in upholding his mission as being of divine origin was in having taken the place of Christ. Since for Zwemer it was not a matter of Christians being more open to the importance of Muhammad as believed by Muslims. To the contrary, he considered Muhammad to be a hindrance to the divine plan of salvation in having taken the place of importance for Muslims. From this we can deduce that Zwemer upheld an exclusivist outlook in which he leaves no room for the

²¹⁸ Forward, *Muhammad: A short Biography*, 105.

suggestion that Muhammad was divinely sent, nor gives him a place of elevation in comparison with that of Christ nor the prophets of the Old Testament.

The examination of Muhammad through the spectacles of Christ would have been a natural outcome for Zwemer and for those with firsthand encounters of the Muslim world. Given this, such an interpretation of Muhammad would put into consideration the exalted Muhammad as portrayed by the Muslim masses as opposed to a dry academic question of examining Muhammad in relation to Christ as a means of comparing like with like by comparing the central figure of Islam with that of Christianity. We have seen that Zwemer's Muhammad was one that had distorted the message of Christ and taken his place, whilst tradition has given him a more exalted position to that given to Christ in Christianity. Yet, contrary to Tisdall's Muhammad who was the 'antichrist' and Hughes' Muhammad who was an 'imposter' Zwemer would leave it for the reader to come to their own conclusion, after arguing that Muhammad's message contradicted that of Christ.

4.4.3. Violence in Muhammad's Life

Zwemer saw violence as taking an important part in Muhammad's life and as exemplified in the later part of his mission. He found this important, in comparing the early history of Christianity with Islam. Zwemer affirming that, unlike the New Testament's portrayal of the early church, the life of Muhammad presents a bloody and violent ordeal as found after the *Hijra*.²¹⁹ We should note that in Islamic jurisprudence there are two kinds of *jihad* (struggle); Greater and lesser *jihad*. The former is one that conveys struggle with self as a means of overcoming temptation from the devil.

Muhammad's mission: *jihad bil saif*

Jihad bil Saif which is a struggle with swords, which have been used in the spread of Islam; it is this kind of *jihad* that we find Zwemer employs in assessing Muhammad's

²¹⁹ Zwemer, *Arabia, The Cradle of Islam*, 184.

Mission. This is apparent in his assertion that the apostle of Islam spread his teaching by ‘forcing it down by means of the sword.’²²⁰ This is exemplified in the slaying of 700 Jewish men from Banu Qurayzah, of which Zwemer affirms that Surah 33:25 is a text that expounds on such bloodshed with more campaigns directed at the Jews and others:

[The] expedition was against the Jews of Bni Koraiza; seven hundred captives were slain, and the women and children sold into slavery. [Followed with more] expeditions against the Jews and idolaters... Other expeditions followed and up to the day, almost the hour, of his death the prophet was planning conquests by the sword. It is a bloody story from the year of the Hegira until the close of the Caliphates.²²¹

We can observe Zwemer’s reliance on Muir in describing the slaughter of the Banu Qurayzah tribe apparent in the similarity of their accounts of the same event. As we see, Zwemer affirms that Muhammad’s use of the sword becomes apparent not long after the *hijra* where he provoked the Koreish tribe into war at the battle of Badr. Zwemer relies on the graphical account of this event in Muir’s *The Life of Mahomet* (1858) to highlight the violent nature of Muhammad as illustrated in *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (1907). Zwemer suggested that:

He who reads it in Muir's volumes [*The Life of Mahomet*] cannot but feel the sad contrast between the early days of Islam and the early days of Christianity. The germ of all *sword-conquest* must be sought in the life and book of Mohammed. Both consecrate butchery in the service of Allah.²²²

We find not just similar accounts of the same event but also discover verbal similarity, while we find differences in the exact figure of the slain.²²³ Muir stated:

But the indiscriminate slaughter of eight hundred men, and the subjugation of the women and children of the whole tribe to slavery, can be recognized by no civilized people otherwise than as an act of enormous ferocity ...[in short] The butchery of the Coreitza [Qurayzah] leaves a dark stain of infamy upon the character of Mahomet.²²⁴

²²⁰ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 24.

²²¹ Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, 36-37, 184.

²²² Zwemer, *Arabia, The Cradle of Islam*, 184.

²²³ The irregularity of the number slain as recorded by Zwemer and Muir is not of great importance, for the reason that the early commentator Ibn Ishaq, as rendered by A. Guillaume, states that ‘there were 600 to 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900’. Ibn Hishām, *The life of Muhammad*, 464.

²²⁴ Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 3rd ed., 284.

Zwemer's narrowing down to the story of the Banu Qurayzah to discuss Muhammad's violent nature, as well as his sign posting to the work of Muir is a clear sign that Zwemer relied on Muir's description of the Prophet of Islam. Interestingly, we find similar conviction upheld by Karl Pfander where he affirms that the Jews were forced to choose between Islam or 'violent death'.²²⁵ For such a reason, Zwemer was not reserved in voicing his objection to Muhammad but rather, along with Henry Martyn (who has been looked at in greater depth in section 2.2.1) emphasised that violence played a vital part in the life of the Prophet of Islam and so in the spread of Islam. To justify such an outlook Zwemer reflects on Muhammad's saying that 'the fire of hell shall not touch the legs of him who is covered with the dust of battle on the road of God.'²²⁶ Which further strengthens the outlook that, for Zwemer, Muhammad did not bring peace but hostility to the world.

Contrary to Zwemer's view that Muhammad used the sword after the *Hijra*, Abdullah O. Al-Abdulkareem believes that such an outlook is biased and misrepresentative of the true nature of the apostle of Islam's involvement in warfare on the basis that the use of the sword was apparent in later Islamic tradition and not found in the life of Muhammad.²²⁷ Meanwhile, Charles Forster (1787-18710) in his work *Mahometanism Unveiled* (1829) would add that a favourable historical situation contributed to his success, while rejecting that any form of violence played a part in such development.²²⁸ However, unlike Abdulkareem and Forster who categorically deny such claim of violence, by writing a revisionist account of the life of Muhammad, Zwemer has convincingly presented that the use of the sword was not an isolated incident in the life of Muhammad. This leads us to conclude that the underlying tone of Zwemer's assessment of the violent nature of Muhammad could have derived from the presupposition that Christianity is a peaceful religion as demonstrated through the teaching of Christ. Moreover, it is probable that the reform theology of separation of church and state, would have influenced Zwemer's negative assessment of the politically-driven activity of Muhammad. It is highly likely

²²⁵ Pfander, *Mizanu'l Haqq*, 354.

²²⁶ Zwemer, *The Cross Above The Crescent*, 46.

²²⁷ Abdulkareem, *Images of Islam*, 259-260.

²²⁸ Forster, *Mahometanism Unveiled*, 68.

that Zwemer does not consider Muhammad a pacifist; on the contrary he argues that violence was a consistent trend of Muhammad's later life, which would have brought further question to the conflicting nature of Christ's teaching to love one's enemy. Interestingly, we should note that, in the present era, the topic of violence in Muhammad's life has been given special attention in a post 9/11 world. Zwemer's findings could bring greater insight as to whether such a worldview could have been inspirational for undertaking acts of aggression.

In summary, Zwemer viewed Muhammad's use of the sword as a clear characteristic in the latter part of his life. Believing that from the *Hijra* onward he had morally deteriorated, as exemplified in the treatment of the Jews in Medina, this is an outlook similar to that of Muir. Moreover, Zwemer would view Muhammad as being violent and as having instituted a violent religion contrary to that of Christ as seen in the early days of both religions. Yet, more importantly, the violence that Muhammad sanctions for Muslims has played its part in the rapid spread of Islam. The use of the sword by Muhammad would not just be limited to a character flawed by Zwemer but rather would have played its part in the rejection of his prophethood. Contrary to the violent passages of the Old Testament, such as Deuteronomy 28:16-18, Zwemer would have found it paramount to use the New Testament as a paradigm, believing that Christ is the example that Christians should follow. For such a reason, Zwemer would be of the view that Christianity spreads through preaching the gospel, in being a spiritual kingdom and not through the human intervention of violence. It is for such a reason that Zwemer would have found it important to reject Muhammad as having gone contrary to the teaching of non-violence as taught by Christ as found in the gospel of Matthew Chapter 5.

In Conclusion, we could mark that the violent ordeal of Muhammad would have been seen by Zwemer as a sign of his lack of comprehension of divine matters, which would have further strengthened the need to reject the claim of being the seal of all prophets in having started an ideology founded and spread through violence.

4.6. Conclusion

Zwemer used different criteria to examine the genuine nature of Muhammad, and the low moral he exemplified to emphasize the lack of divine origin of Islam. The use of Islamic law or the law of the Arabs at the time of Muhammad to examine the prophet of Islam should not be mistaken to represent the endorsement by Zwemer of such laws. But rather, Zwemer's main concern was Muhammad's short coming examined through the lens Christian scripture in general and with the person of Jesus Christ in particular.

Moreover, Zwemer perceived that, Muslims have given Muhammad the role of a saviour, if not the means by which one could get salvation. Yet as one who preaches *solo Christo* his concern would be reflected on a soteriological ground, since, the role uniquely reserved to Christ would have been given to another.

This no doubt reflects his exclusivist outlook of preaching the salvation found exclusively in Christ. Thus, in turn, the Muslims assertion of Muhammad as the seal of the prophet would have had no room in the divine plan of salvation. In addition, veneration of Muhammad by Muslims as *par excellence* would have led naturally to Zwemer's criteria for judging Muhammad's prophetic calling, as exemplified in the corruptible changes present with Muhammad after the *Hijra*, in a way similar to Muir's assertions.

We could argue that, had Muhammad presented a fair depiction of biblical doctrines whilst diverting from the orthodox Christological teaching, Zwemer would have rejected Muhammad's claim of divine calling since Christ would have been central in Zwemer's evaluation of Muhammad. May we add that such finding is not surprising given that Zwemer would hold these views about Muhammad because of his own Christian beliefs. However, what is remarkable is that he tends to portray the Arabian prophet according to the model of Christ.

Moreover, Zwemer showed concern regarding the contemporary Muslim portrayal of Muhammad vis-à-vis the Muhammad of history. The question of how the religion

founded by Muhammad could have spread to the degree it has in a post-Christ era is not explicitly addressed by Zwemer. However, as a missionary to Muslims we find that his concern would focus on the nature of Islam in being the greatest challenge the church is facing in light of its expansion in Africa and Asia as well as the restriction put upon the missionary activity in the Muslim world. Moreover, the problem Zwemer faces along with all students of Islam is that he was examining the Muhammad as found in Muslim sources written hundreds of years after the time which would bring in to question the reliability of the sources as a means of reconstructing an impartial portrayal of Muhammad.

In light of Zwemer's suggestion regarding the violent nature of Muhammad, further study could be undertaken as a means of discovering his outlook on the nature of *jihad* and what role it played in the spread of Islam; although we should have in mind that such a topic is outside the scope of this study in diverging a great deal from the set themes proposed for this study. We will conclude by reflecting that Zwemer is unconvinced with the superficial labelling of Muhammad as nothing more than a prophet given that, in reality for the Muslim masses, what Christ is for Christians Muhammad is for Muslims, in having obtained an exalted position of an intercessor. To this he affirms that the glory given Muhammad in Islam is illegitimate and asserts that in every comparison made between both significant figures of faith the Islamic Prophet would come short. To which concept he found it legitimate to assert:

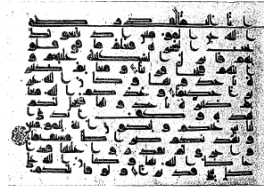
The sin and the guilt of the Mohammedan world is that they give Christ's glory to another, *and that for all practical purposes Mohammed himself is the Moslem Christ.*²²⁹

²²⁹ Zwemer, *Moslem Christ*, 157, 166.

5. Zwemer's Attitude to and Evaluation of the Quran



Surah 39:1-4



Surah 41:1-2



Surah 11:1-3

PAGES FROM THE KORAN IN EARLY CUFCIC CHARACTERS



A PAGE FROM A POLYGLOT KORAN: ARABIC—PERSIAN—URDU

[Zwemer, *Islam*, 9.]

[Zwemer, *Mohammad or Christ*, 161.]



COPIES OF THE KORAN WORN BY MUSLEMS WHEN TRAVELING OR ON PILGRIMAGE

[Zwemer, *Islam*, 20.]

5.1. Introduction

The Koran may not be sold to Unbelievers; soldiers are advised not to take it with them into hostile territory for fear the Unbeliever should get hold of it ; and many a copy bears upon it a warning to Unbelievers not to touch. Pious grammarians have refused to teach grammar to Jews or Christians, because the rules were apt to be illustrated by quotations from the sacred volume.²³⁰

If the above assessment by Dr D. S. Margoliouth is true, Zwemer's study of the Quran would no doubt have been considered as the study of the sacred text in an enemy territory. As we will discover, Zwemer's assessment of the Quran diverges a great deal from Islamic tradition. Interestingly, we find a wide spectrum in Christian views of the Quran: while on one hand we have those who view the Quran to be of demonic origin, on the other hand the Islamic text is viewed as a preparation for salvation. In looking at Christian views of the Quran in history, we find that Al Kindi described the Quran as a 'rag-tag of discrepancies and garbled tales'²³¹ while John of Damascus defined it to be a 'ridiculous compositions'²³². In Martin Luther we find the strongest denunciation of the Quran when he views the Islamic text to be a manifestation of demonic possession of Muhammad.²³³

As a means of establishing Zwemer's attitude to and evaluation of the Quran, we will examine his view of the style, content and sources of the Quran, along with the answer he gives to the question of the contribution of the Quran to the advancement of society. This is followed by the much discussed topic of the Quranic witness to the Christian scripture. We will start by looking at Zwemer's outlook on the translation of the Quran.

5.2. Translation of the Quran

²³⁰ Cited in Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 155.

²³¹ Bennett, *In search of Muhammad*, 76.

²³² *On Heresies*, 153.

²³³ Francisco, *Martin Luther*, 131.

Zwemer encourages the availability of the Quran in the language used by Muslims in the Islamic world, believing that it will make it possible for Muslims to understand the Islamic scripture and in turn compare it with the Christian scripture. He asserts that:

From the missionary standpoint we have nothing to fear from modern Koran translations; rather may we not hope that the contrast between the Bible and the Koran will be evident to all readers when they compare them in their vernacular?²³⁴

Yet Zwemer identifies the difficulty that linguists faced in their translation effort to be the Quran itself. As he puts it:

The difficulty with the Koran is that it is in a sense untranslatable. To imitate its rhyme and rhythm is impossible. Its beauty is altogether in its style, and, therefore, necessarily artificial. For the sake of the rhyme unnecessary repetitions are frequently made, which interrupt the sense of the passage and sometimes even appear ridiculous in a translation.²³⁵

Such an outlook is further expounded in Zwemer's later work entitled *The Cross Above the Crescent* (1941) in the section 'The Battle of the Books', where he presents testimonies of Arab Muslim converts encountering the Christian scripture. Zwemer pinpoints the problem to be the lack of a translated Quran, accessible to the Muslim masses, due to Muslim reluctance in undertaking such an endeavour. Taking the European languages as a case study Zwemer argues that such translations had all been undertaken by non-Muslims. Reflecting on his personal encounters with Muslims, Zwemer brings to the fore how the lack of accessibility of the Quran in the local dialect had led the Muslim masses to attribute a superstitious position to the Islamic text; he noted that Muslims 'carry the Koran everywhere... If they cannot read it they can, at least, kiss it or wear it as an amulet!'²³⁶ It is practices such as these that led Zwemer to propose a 'hands on' approach for Muslims to explore the content of the Islamic text.

²³⁴ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 176.

²³⁵ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 157.

²³⁶ Zwemer, *Islam*, 80.

An important figure in Christian study of Islamic scripture is George Sale (1697-1736). He translated the Quran into English (1734), and the introductory section of this translation, entitled *Preliminary Discourse*, has been perceived to be the turning point in the Christian study of the Quran because of its willingness ‘to listen to Muslim voices’.²³⁷ It is no surprise that Zwemer viewed Sale’s translation as a work that would ‘always stand as one of the most valuable contributions to the study of Islam.’²³⁸ Sale’s use of Islamic sources in introducing the Quran to western readership was by no means intended to show the divine inspiration of the Islamic scripture. On the contrary, he viewed the Quran to be a challenge as opposed to a bridge for Christian engagement with Islam.

Moreover, Martin Luther (1483-1546), the German reformer, affirmed that it was possible to disprove the Quranic claims through an informed position of knowledge. Luther asks:

[What] are we able to say about things of which we are ignorant? It is, therefore, useful for those who are experienced to read the writings of the enemy (Quran) in order to refute accurately, to damage and destroy them so that teachers in the church might be capable of correcting anyone and equipping our people with substantive arguments [for the faith].²³⁹

While Zwemer was familiar with the work of Sale, yet his approach to the need of a translated Quran was similar to that of Luther. While Luther is known for promoting the need of the availability of the Christian scripture for the masses we find him here proposing that such effort to be applied to the Quran for completely different reasons. Luther argued for the need of a translated Quran as a means of refuting polemical arguments directed against Christian doctrine and, in turn, to give an effective answer to the challenge Muslims bring to fundamental Christian doctrines by going to the source in order to address the issue. Luther’s encouragement of Christian study of the Islamic scripture makes it highly likely that he would have been in agreement or, if not, that he would have been unopposed to Zwemer’s optimism for Quran translations. Most importantly, Luther’s main concern for the need of the availability of the Quran for Christians is so that the church would be able to answer Islamic

²³⁷ Bennett, *In search of Muhammad*, 99.

²³⁸ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 163.

²³⁹ (WA 53: 572) cited in Francisco, ‘Introduction’, 6.

objections to fundamental Christian doctrines such as the incarnation and the crucifixion of Christ.

In contrast to Luther, Zwemer's support for the need of the translated Quran was not necessarily for Christians but rather for Muslims, because he believed that Muslims would come to a sober outlook of the Quran. We should add that there is no clear evidence that Zwemer was influenced directly by Luther's work; however, Luther's strong influence on Protestantism could in turn have played its part in shaping Zwemer's outlook of the scriptures of non-Christian religions.

One important point to raise is that the main reason for the reserve shown by the *Ulama* in undertaking translations of the Quran is theological. The Quran is believed to be the eternal word of God, *Umm al-Kitab* (Surah 43:3), preserved throughout eternity and revealed in the language of heaven – Arabic (Surah 12:2; 13:37; 41:41,44). For this reason, valid recitation is undertaken in Arabic. Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), a native English convert to Islam, and the first to translate the Quran into the English language as a Muslim, in reflecting on such matters, emphasized that:

The Koran cannot be translation... [such translation] is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Koran – and peradventure something of the charm – in English.²⁴⁰

The Muslim objection to the translated Quran is primarily theological, given that it is believed that the Arabic language is not just the language of the original Quran but rather the only medium in which it could be read, this brings further hindrance to the need of Quran translation. We should remember that Zwemer's encouragement of Muslims to further translate their sacred scripture was in the context of upholding the Protestant assertion of the need for the 'word of God' being available in the local languages.

In a post second world war era it has been argued that more effort has been underway in the translation of the Quran into different languages.²⁴¹ This could, to some degree,

²⁴⁰ Pickthall, *The Meaning of The Glorious Qur'an*, vii.

give an answer to Zwemer's objection. However, we should note that such effort is by no means comparable to the effort undertaken in the translation of Christian scriptures into local dialects. Nevertheless, one important factor Zwemer has not put into consideration is that the low level of literacy in the Muslim world would have had to be addressed prior to raising the issue of translation. Having said this, the issue still stands that if the Quran is believed to be a scripture to be read only in Arabic, it brings a further dilemma to the religion which claims universal relevance. Indeed, the conservative outlook of the Quran could be seen to be nothing short of Arabization.

To recap, Sales' translation of the Quran was aimed at a western readership and Luther's encouragement of Christian Study of the Quran was as a means of refuting its teaching. Zwemer had a different approach, highlighting the need for further availability of the Islamic text in different languages aimed at a Muslim readership. This would be in order for Muslims to have a greater understanding of their scripture and in turn be able to compare it with the Christian scripture.

5.3. Style of the Quran

Zwemer found the style of the Quran to be a point of appreciation in the earlier part of his life, as he put it:

The poetical beauties of the Koran and of its literary character. We do not deny also that there are in the Koran certain moral beauties, such as its deep and fervent trust in the one God, its lofty descriptions of His Almighty power and omnipresence.²⁴²

It is interesting that we find such an appraisal in Thomas P. Hughes, who while reflecting on the style of the Quran, affirms:

[W]e are not insensible to the beauties of the Qur'an as a literary production (although they have, without doubt, been overrated); but as we admire its conceptions of the Divine nature, its deep and fervent trust in the power of God, its frequent deep moral earnestness, and its sententious wisdom.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Bobzin, 'Translation of The Qur'ān', 343.

²⁴² Zwemer, *Arabia*, 188.

²⁴³ Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 399.

Such similar outlook on the style of the Quran is no coincidence, but rather is due to Hughes' influence on Zwemer to the point that he put Hughes' article, entitled 'Characterization of Mohammed' from *Dictionary of Islam*, on the appendix section of *Arabia* (1907). However, we discover that later in his life Zwemer changed his outlook on the style of the Quran. As opposed to echoing his contemporaries – as he seems to have done earlier in his life with Hughes – further reflection on such matters would lead Zwemer to change his mind, asserting that the Quran's 'style is obscure even to adult Arabs'.²⁴⁴

Martyn does not find the style of the Quran to be impressive. He says:

[The Quran] possesses nothing like real elegance, for it contains neither poetry nor arrangement, but abounds with useless repetitions, and in many instances has nothing to recommend it but the mere Rhythmus.²⁴⁵

Likewise, Pfander does not find the style of the Quran to be in any way a ground for its elevation, arguing that poetical works should not be the criterion in judging a work as being of divine origin. Pfander challenged the Islamic claim regarding the unsurpassable nature of the Quran by asking:

Even were it proved beyond the possibility of doubt that the Qur'an far surpasses all other books in eloquence, elegance, and poetry, that would no more prove its inspiration than a man's strength would demonstrate his wisdom or a woman's beauty her virtue.²⁴⁶

While Martyn's claim was farfetched in insisting that there was no poetry in the Quran, which there is, Pfander argued for a different paradigm in judging that poetry and eloquence cannot decide the issue of the divine origin of a text.

It is in the light of the claim of Muslim apologists as to the superior nature of the style of the Quran when compared to all other literature that Zwemer addressed this topic. Zwemer started by showing some positive outlook regarding the Quran, but later changed his mind.

²⁴⁴ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 196.

²⁴⁵ Martyn, *Controversial Tract*, 113.

²⁴⁶ Pfander, *The Mizanu'l Haqq*, 267.

5.4. Content of the Quran

Zwemer addresses the content of the Quran in his first major work *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam* in the chapter entitled 'The Prophet and his book'. In this work, Zwemer introduces the Quran to western readers by highlighting the incomprehensible nature of the book when he asserts '[w]hat strikes the reader first of all is its jumbled character; every sort of fact and fancy, law and legend is thrown together piecemeal.'²⁴⁷ Moreover, the Muslim claim about the superior nature of the Quran failed to impress Zwemer. Being fluent in Arabic and having had first-hand encounters with the Muslim world he came to a sobering conclusion: he asserted that the Islamic scripture is:

Unintelligible to the average Moslem without a commentary, and I defy anyone else to read it through, without the aid of notes, and understand a single chapter or even section.²⁴⁸

In his later work, Zwemer repeated his objection to the Quran along similar lines. He asserted that the Islamic scripture:

Has no logical order nor sequence. It throws together fact and fancy, law and legends, prayers and imprecation. The defects of its teachings are many and its historical errors evident even to the casual reader.²⁴⁹

In addition, for Zwemer, science is not on the side of the Islamic text; by looking at Surah 9:36-37 he highlights, rightly, the Quranic lunar calendar as being an insufficient representation of an accurate yearly cycle. He states:

The Moslem calendar, with its twelve lunar months and its two great feast days, is fixed according to the laws of the Koran and orthodox tradition.²⁵⁰

Zwemer's concern is justifiable for the reason that the Muslim world follows the inaccurate calendar as outlined in the Quran as a means of maintaining the inimitability of the Quran rather than correcting such a mistake. Such a problem is not

²⁴⁷ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 187-8.

²⁴⁸ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 187-8.

²⁴⁹ Zwemer, *The Cross Above the Crescent*, 218.

²⁵⁰ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 139.40.

an uncommon phenomenon in Islamic theology, which highlights the difficulty in moving away from the content of the Quran and objectively engaging with the sciences (as we will see in section 5.5.).

Zwemer's view of the content of the Quran remained more or less consistent in both his earlier and later work. As for Muir, the Quran was a disorganised document in being a product of Muhammad's lack of coherence. As he put it:

His (Muhammad) ideas changed... upon many important points during the progress of his ministry. His deliverances were elicited by the events of the passing moment, and from them took their form and colouring. We must therefore accept his differing statements just as we find them, and should greatly err if we sought to draw them into any consistent shape and system.²⁵¹

Having said that, Muir's familiarity with the biography of Muhammad to a greater degree than Zwemer, and his belief in the Islamic scripture being a product of the prophet of Islam, naturally led him to the effort of putting the Quran in the sequence of the chronological order of Muhammad's biography as portrayed in the *sira* and *hadith*. This was a means of exposing the fragmented nature of the Quran and its lack of self-explanation.

We find a similar, yet unreserved, denunciation of the Quran by Salomon Reinach (1858-1932) in his famous work *Orpheus* (1909). In presenting an overview of the historical study of religion, he asserts that:

[f]rom the literary point of view, the Koran has little merit. Declamation, repetition, puerility, a lack of logic and coherence strike the unprepared reader at every turn. It is humiliating to the human intellect to think that this mediocre literature has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, and that millions of men are still wasting time absorbing it.²⁵²

Zwemer does not refer to, nor is it clear he was familiar with Reinach's work, yet such an assessment of the content of the Quran was one Zwemer would have wholeheartedly supported. Such a negative outlook of the Quran was not a reflection of the academic views of his time, but resulted from his own deeper reflection on the matter.

²⁵¹ Muir, *The Corân*, 50.

²⁵² Reinach, *Orpheus: A History of Religion*, 176.

As we have seen, Zwemer objected to the Quran on account of its content. Contrary to Muir who attempted to make sense of the Quran by relying on external sources, Zwemer found it fitting to reject the Islamic text having examined it on its own terms.

5.5. Quran against progress

Where ever I go in the Islamic world, it's the same problem: cause and effect; cause and effect. **Fouad Ajami**

Zwemer's first-hand encounter of the Muslim world gave him greater insight into the study of the Quran. It could be for that reason that he viewed the Quran to have played its part in the backwardness he encountered. As he put it, the Quran 'is both socially and morally and spiritually to-day the greatest retrograde force in the world.'²⁵³ We discover that such arguments played an underlying tone in the five lectures Zwemer gave in Princeton Theological Seminary in 1915 which were later to be published as a book entitled *Disintegration of Islam* (1916). Zwemer encouraged Muslims to move away from the Islamic scripture and in turn would see any move towards the Quran to be a hindrance to the advancement of the Muslim world.

Muslims would argue to the contrary, believing that the solution to the lack of progress as found in the Muslim world to be in the Quran. Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), an Islamic reformer (to be examined in some depth in section 6.3.1), in lamenting this problem asserted:

if people (Muslims) do not break with *taqlid* (tradition) and not seek (especially) that light which is gained from [the] Qur'an ... then Islam will disappear from India.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Zwemer, *Muhammad or Christ*, 194.

²⁵⁴ Sayyid Ahmed Khan cited in Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad khan*, 128.

For Khan, a return to the Islamic sources was not a choice but a matter of survival for the religion that saw the Quran as its authority. Such a view would have been proposed as a means of countering the degrading customs and, in turn was an attempt to bring about transformation in society. However, in reality Khan tried to bring Muslim advancement by the adoption of western forms of education and political lobbying, contrary to the Deobandi movement that aimed at bringing reformation by going back to the Quran, Hadith and the implementation of Sharia law.

Contrary to those who wanted to go back to the Quran, Zwemer argued for a move away from the Quran, believing that the state of the Islamic world was due to the Islamic text. Hubers gives us a good picture in his portrayal of the Quran as being the way of darkness that leads to backwardness. As he put it:

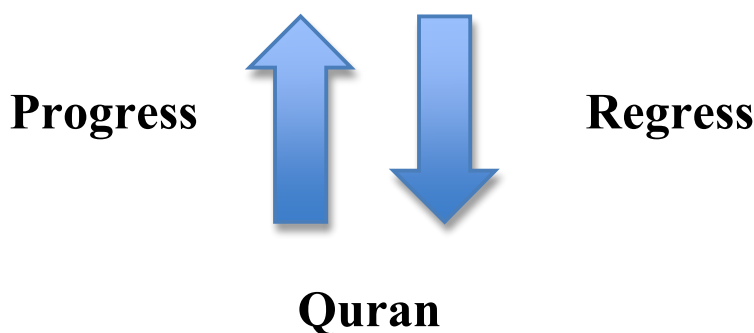
Zwemer dismisses the Qur'an as a jumble of distorted history, fables, and superstition, which he saw as a mirror of Muhammad's debased morality.... Muhammad's teaching in the Qur'an... led millions of people who came under the influence of his teaching into an immoral lifestyle that required the liberation of the Gospel.²⁵⁵

Coming back to Khan's view of Islam in India, his assertion of the need for reformation by going back to the Quran could be interpreted as a 'scape goat' rather than engaging with the main issue. Khan acknowledged the lack of progress in the Muslim world, but stopped short of dealing with the problems as found in the source itself. He did not realise that the literal application of the Quran would result in a society wanting to imitate a seventh-century Arabian worldview, as exemplified in the life of Muhammad, which, in turn, would result in a backward society. One could ask how Khan would have defended the much-practiced custom of marriage to pre-pubic girls (65:4) and the instruction of men to beat their disobedient wives (4:34), to mention just two of the problematic passages sanctioned in the Quran. However, we find a more realistic diagnosis in Zwemer and Muir of the problematic role that the Quran has played in keeping the Muslim world in a backward state.

²⁵⁵ Hubers, *Samuel Zwemer and The Challenge of Islam*, 119.

In the present context, there is a struggle in the Muslim world as to who represents the true Islam. An example would be the blasphemy law in Pakistan, which asserts the death sentence to those who insult Muhammad. The likes of Khan – progressive Muslims - would attempt to abrogate the law by highlighting its time-bound nature. This would be contrary to the Deobandi group who would view any attempt at change to be a tampering with the divine decree. This attitude would in turn produce a society that defends Islam at all costs, even at the expense of making it incompatible with the universal declaration of human rights. This also makes it unable to engage with an open enquiry in the sciences, fearing that it might go contrary to the teaching of the Quran.

Zwemer's outlook could have originated in his being of the Reformed tradition, in that he would have viewed the positive influence of the Christian scripture in the West as having led to progress and scientific discovery, the fruits of which are visible in the 21st century.²⁵⁶ This is the polar opposite to the social degradation that Zwemer encountered in the Moslem world due to the teaching of the Quran. It is for such reasons that Zwemer proposed a rejection of, as opposed to a return to the Islamic text as proposed by Khan.



²⁵⁶ For further on the influence the Protestantism has played in the West see Alister McGrath's work *Christianity Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution – A History From The Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-first*.

5.6. Quranic witness to Christian Scripture

Zwemer believed that the Quran depicted the Old and New Testament to be revelatory works. As a result Zwemer could speak highly of the Quran. In his early days of mission in Arabia, Zwemer looked favourably on the Quranic teaching that bears witness to the Christian scripture and called it the 'best part' of the Quran.²⁵⁷ Zwemer highlighted the weight the Quran gives to the Christian scripture through the use of language familiar to Muslim ears. He proclaimed:

Ta'al shoof! Come and see. Here is an Arabic Gospel, a portion of the whole Injil of Isa the prophet only one anna. Have you read it? The Koran says it is 'light and guidance.' Or do you want to read the wonderful Psalms of Nebi Daood in this pretty green binding for three annas? Here is the whole Torah in Persian for one rupee or a gilt-edged New Testament almost 'Bilash' at two krans.²⁵⁸

Moreover, Zwemer attempted to address *tahrif* which is the Islamic doctrine of the corruption of the Christian scripture. He challenged Muslims thus:

[y]ou don't care to read the Holy Book because it has been corrupted, you say? How do you know if you have not read it?²⁵⁹

Yet, Zwemer saw the Quran itself as being part of the problem vis-a-vis its claim of being a continuation in the long line of revelations as witnessed by the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. He affirms that:

The Koran is remarkable most of all not because of its contents but because of its omissions. Not because of what it reveals but for what it conceals of "former revelations."²⁶⁰

It is in addressing such issues that Kate Zebiri would affirm that the Islamic claim of supercession 'is one of the most important acts of radical discontinuity that occurred in history'.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Zwemer, *The Cross above The Crescent*. 225.

²⁵⁸ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 112.

²⁵⁹ Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, 112.

²⁶⁰ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 190-91.

²⁶¹ Zebiri, *Muslim and Christian Face toFace*, 137.

In looking at Zwemer's evangelical predecessors we find strong emphasis put on the Quranic witness to the Christian scripture. Muir would view it to be the 'one good thing' of the Quran.²⁶² He explores such claims in *The Coran: Its Composition and Teaching; and The Testimony it Bears to The Holy Scriptures* (1878). Unsurprisingly it is this work that Zwemer found to be a 'valuable compendium' and 'accurate'.²⁶³ Muir goes through the Meccan and Medinan surahs in a chronological fashion as a means of establishing that the Old and New Testament:

Are never mentioned' in the Quran 'otherwise than with profound veneration, and may thus have their attention drawn to their Divine origin, and the inestimable value of their teaching.'²⁶⁴

In Tisdall's apologetical work *A Manual of the Leading Muhammadan Objections to Christianity* (1904) he argues that such a claim is the grounds for establishing the incorruptibility of the Christian scripture. He asserts that the scripture the Quran has 'spoken of as in the hands of "the People of the Book," denotes our canonical Scriptures.'²⁶⁵ Likewise, Pfander would argue that the 'Qur'an applies to the Bible the very loftiest titles, calling it the Word of God'.²⁶⁶ As he put it,

The Old Testament and the New which are now in circulation among the Jews and the Christians are those which existed among them in Muhammad's time, and to which the Qur'an bears witness, it is incumbent upon all true Muslims to read them with earnest prayer to God Most Merciful, that He would aid them to understand "the Book of God".²⁶⁷

In looking at Zwemer's successors we find a different approach in establishing the authority of the Christian scripture through the Quran. Believing that God is able to use anything for His purpose, as opposed to turning to the Quranic witness of the Christian scripture, Colin Chapman believes that the Quran is a product of Muhammad having encountered the revelation accessible to all, therefore it could be upheld that it contains elements of truth. As he put it

²⁶² Foreword by Muir in the Tisdall work, *The Source of Islam*, xii.

²⁶³ Zwemer, *Islam*, 274.

²⁶⁴ Muir, *The Coran: Its Composition and Teaching*, 69.

²⁶⁵ Tisdall, "The Book" of The "People of The Book", 170.

²⁶⁶ Pfander, *Mizan u'l Haqq*, 100.

²⁶⁷ Pfander, *Mizan u'l Haqq*, 100.

Any revelation Muhammad received was no different from the general revelation that is available to all men...This would mean that if God had real personal dealings with Muhammad (as I believe most strongly that he did), they were no different in kind from his dealings with all men who are seeking after God.²⁶⁸

As for Michael Nazir Ali, the Quran can be used to form bridges in Christian Muslim engagement, in which he finds it paramount to highlight the part of the Quran that gives an adequate representation of Christian scripture. He explains: 'At least some parts of the *Qur'an*... there seems to be a genuine encounter with the Supreme reality of the Universe.... We can also accept as true all that the *Qur'an* records accurately of biblical persons and events.'²⁶⁹

Zwemer is more balanced realistic in his assessment of the limits of the Quran's witness to the Christian scripture. He sees a predicament apparent in the Christian engagement with Muslims as summarised by Jens Christensen, who asserts that '[w]ithout doubt there are parts of the Quran which a Christian could gladly accept and enjoy reading—if they were not parts of a whole.'²⁷⁰ For Zwemer, the Quran is inconsistent in its claims: while it gives authority to the Bible, it fails to portray adequately what it claims to give authority to. Being of the Reformed tradition, Zwemer upheld the authority and finality of Christian Scripture and this, in turn, influenced his view of the Quran. This is contrary to those who undertake training for ministry in the present context with Biblical Criticism taking an important part in their biblical exegeses. Such an approach to scripture would not have been present in America while Zwemer was in seminary, but was a later phenomenon. This is similar to Pfander's experience as is made apparent in the description of his studies at Basel Seminary to be a 'devotional and uncritical approach to Biblical studies.'²⁷¹

To this we could assert that Zwemer's primary objection to the Quran was due to a theological reason. That is to say, in describing 'omissions' in the Quran, this did not entail the part that failed to be included in the Islamic scripture due to having been

²⁶⁸ Chapman, 'Going Soft on Islam?', 11.

²⁶⁹ Nazil Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter*, 128.

²⁷⁰ Christensen, *Mission to Islam and Beyond*, 367.

²⁷¹ Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-mutiny India*, 133.

forgotten or lost by Muhammad's companions but,²⁷² rather, that the Quran omitted the central teaching of the gospels in orthodox Christology and the redemptive work of Christ. It is for such reasons that Zwemer accused the Quran of trying to 'conceal former revelation'. Interestingly, the only time Zwemer turned to the Quran as a means of establishing the authoritative nature of the Bible was in his engagement with Muslims in the mission field and not in his presentation of the Islamic scriptures to a Christian/Western readership. The purpose was to encourage Muslims to read it and then make up their mind, as opposed to viewing the Quran to have an authority in its own terms.

Similarly, Pfander turned to the Quran to highlight the authority of the Bible in engaging Muslims, yet went further in adding that the Quranic witness of the Hebrew and Christian scripture was identical in nature to the one upheld to be canonical by Christians. No doubt such an approach would have been problematic in light of the irreconcilable divergences we witness in both scriptures. For example, the story of Jesus as found in the Quran is similar in nature to that found in the gospel of the Infancy of Jesus, which is a Gnostic work considered to be a later development. Moreover, Pfander, Tisdall and Muir argued that Muslim claims about the corrupted nature of the Christian scripture were unfounded and, rather, asserted that the Quran testifies to the contrary.

Such an outlook has in many ways shaped the manner in which Christian missions have been undertaken among Muslims. What Zwemer and Pfander look at in passing, i.e. the authority the Quran given to the Christian scripture, Muir would study in greater depth as a means of solidifying such an assertion. It is clear that Zwemer was familiar with Muir's work and viewed it in a favourable light, which in turn influenced his perception of the Quran.

²⁷² Ibn Warraq, *The Origins of the Koran*, 14.

While Zwemer attempted to establish the authority of the Christian scripture by bringing to the fore the importance it has in the Quran, Chapman argues on the grounds of general revelation. That is, the content of the Quran as a reflection of revelation accessible to all and that agrees with that found in the Christian scripture. On the other hand, Nazir Ali pleads for special revelation as found in scripture to be the criteria in judging the genuineness of the Quran. Contrary to Zwemer we don't find Chapman using the Quran's witness as a means of establishing the genuineness of the Christian scripture, rather, believing the Quran to be a product of the human quest of the divine and within that, having the possibility of forming a bridge of expanding 'Christian truth' to Muslims. Meanwhile, Nazir Ali would perceive the Quran to be partly the result of divine encounter on the condition that it agrees with the Christian scripture.

Zwemer's outlook differs from that of Chapman and Nazir Ali on the grounds that he saw an inadequate portrayal of the depiction of Christian 'truth' within the Quran. In examining the death of Christ as an example, we find distinctively in the Quran that someone else died in the place of Jesus (4:157); this contradicts directly the unanimous account of the gospels that assert that it was Jesus that died on the cross. Having said this, we should add that they would each have held in common that the Quran falls short in the special revelation of the fullness of God as obtained through the person of Christ.

It is unsurprising to discover that Zwemer employs the use of the Quran in establishing the authenticity of the Christian scripture as a means of countering the deeply rooted Islamic doctrine of *tahrif*. Yet, it is clear that such an approach is not unique to Zwemer but is a common phenomenon for those who were involved in missionary endeavour to different degrees. Compared to others, Zwemer did not see the Quran to be a preparation for salvation in Christ. Zwemer's - along with Muir, Tisdall and Pfander's - deployment of the Quran's witness to Christian scripture was in the framework of effective evangelism to Muslims. However, as we shall see, Zwemer's approach was not without its limitations; given that, he asserted that the

borrowing that the Quran undertakes is from Talmudic Jewish and unorthodox Christian sources rather than from the scriptures themselves.

It must be noted that the Quranic witness to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, while at the same time contradicting their content, could have been resolved. The reason is that the canon of Christian scripture was established by the seventh century, yet there is no evidence to pinpoint that an Arabic Bible was accessible to the compilers of the Quran. Had that been the case, such a translation could have been a guide to those who had shaped the Islamic scripture and might have saved such a blunder of affirmation of the previous scriptures while contradicting their message.

5.7. Sources of the Quran

Zwemer associates the origin of the Quran with that of Muhammad, asserting that he formed the religion by borrowing from the contemporary ideologies of his day as a means of molding a new ideology which best suited him. Thus Zwemer affirmed, the Quran:

Is not an invention but a concoction; there is nothing novel about it except the genius of Mohammed in mixing old ingredients into a new panacea for human ills.²⁷³

As for the sources of such borrowing Zwemer equated it to Jewish, Christian and polytheistic religions, arguing that the biblical themes present in the Quran were due to Muhammad's borrowing from his contact with Jews familiar with Hebrew Scriptures. He asserted that Muhammad 'obtained his knowledge of Old Testament history from Jews well versed in Talmudic lore'.²⁷⁴ The problem this raises is that the Quran borrows from 'Talmudic Judaism and not the Judaism of the Old Testament'.²⁷⁵ Moreover, of the themes of the New Testament, as found in the Quran, Zwemer asserted that the:

²⁷³ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 170.

²⁷⁴ Zwemer, *Islam*, 16.

²⁷⁵ Zwemer, *Arabia: Cradle of Islam*, 190

[T]he Christian factor cannot be omitted in our study of the origin of Islam. Christian fiddling, though often in corrupt form, was one of the sources of the new religion.²⁷⁶

As for the borrowing from the Arabian religions of the day Zwemer stated ‘the pagan elements that persist in the Moslem faith to this day... were taken over by Mohammed himself from the old Arabian idolatry.’²⁷⁷ Zwemer would associate the origin of the Quran as being from Muhammad through his use of corrupt forms of Jewish and Christian sources along with Arab pagan elements as a means of forming his own religion. It is for such reasons that Zwemer would assert the fact that:

Islam in its origin and popular character is a composite faith, with Pagan, Jewish and Christian elements, is known to all students of comparative religion.²⁷⁸

Ipema is not off the mark in interpreting Zwemer’s perception of the Quran as a ‘purely human, Muhammadan product’.²⁷⁹

As for Muir, the Quran originated solely from Muhammad, believing that the Quran is a ‘store-house of *Mahomet’s own words recorded during his life*, extending over the whole course of his public acts, and his domestic character’ adding that ‘so true a mirror is the Coran of Mahomet’s character.’²⁸⁰ Muir would view the application of literary criticism as having the aim of putting into question the Muslim claim of the Divine origin of the Quran and Muhammad as the medium of such revelation. In writing a forward to Tisdall’s ground-breaking work on the Quran, Muir would suggest that ‘if it be shown that much of this grand book (Quran) can be traced to human Sources existing daily around the Prophet, then Islam falls to the ground.’²⁸¹

For Muir, proving the origin of the Quran from human sources was very important, as this resulted in the conviction that it was not a divine revelation. The belief that the Quran originated from Muhammad led to the view that the Quran could be interpreted in the light of Muhammad’s life. This is an approach not explored by Zwemer,

²⁷⁶ Zwemer, *Islam*, 22.

²⁷⁷ Zwemer, *Influence of Animism in Islam*, 1.

²⁷⁸ Zwemer, *Influence of Animism in Islam*, 1.

²⁷⁹ Ipema, *The Islam Interpretations of Duncan B. MacDonald, Samuel M. Zwemer*, 217.

²⁸⁰ Muir, *Life of Mahomet*, (Vol 1.), xxvii.

²⁸¹ Tisdall, *The Source of Islam*, vii.

possibly due to his view that the Quran was incoherent and incapable of being put in chronological order.

Abraham Geiger's (1810-1874) ground-breaking work entitled *Judaism and Islam* (1898)²⁸² argues that the Quranic literature borrowed selectively from Jewish Talmudic sources and that through distortion of these sources it, in turn, propagated the new religion founded by Muhammad. As he put it:

It is clear in itself that he (Muhammad) could not adopt the whole of Judaism into his system, but parts only and even these he was obliged to alter and rearrange... while he totally excluded some things, he was obliged to elaborate and alter other things with which he could not dispense, in order that they might still more, strengthen his own position.²⁸³

In such instances Zwemer is in agreement with Geiger, in seeing the Quran to be a distortion of seventh-century Judaism purposed to serve Muhammad. This is made apparent in his appraisal that Geiger's research 'conclusively' shows such borrowing when it clearly lays out the 'parallels between the Talmud and the Koran.'²⁸⁴

Geiger and Zwemer would agree about the lack of originality of the Quran in that it was 'a borrowing'. The former highlighted the anti-Jewish elements of the Quran, to the point that he dedicated one section of his work to address this problem. While the latter's primary concern was with the distortion of the Hebrew scripture. Unsurprisingly, such a distinct emphasis is reflective of the religious traditions they upheld, Geiger as a Jew and Zwemer as a Christian. Yet, as a missionary to Muslims, Zwemer's study was an attempt to show the incorruptibility of the Christian scripture contrary to Muslim claims, and in turn show the Quran's lack of divine origin.

For Tisdall the error found in the Quran is made apparent in the wrong portrayal of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and is a pointer to what Muhammad incorporated into his Quran. He affirmed:

²⁸² Translated from the German edition: *Was hat Mohammed aus das Judenthume aufgenommen?* (1833).

²⁸³ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 23-4.

²⁸⁴ Zwemer, *Islam*, 271.

The Koran undoubtedly shows how little of the Bible Mohammed knew, and how often he fancied that Rabbinical fables and tales which he heard orally from ignorant Christians were parts of "the Book."²⁸⁵

This is exemplified in that the 'history of Mary, as related in the Quran ... is taken almost entirely from the apocryphal Gospels'.²⁸⁶ Zwemer speaks highly of Tisdall's work who could be perceived to be his guide in examining the sources of the Quran, in many instances believing it to be the:

Best book on the whole subject [since it] traces Moslem beliefs to the original heathen, Zoroastrian, and Jewish sources. Invaluable and compact handbook.²⁸⁷

As we have seen, the view that the Quran is a borrowing from different sources is commonly held by Zwemer's predecessors. We find such argument in its less developed form in Martyn's view of the Quran as being partly taken 'from the Jews, and others from the Magi or Persians'.²⁸⁸ He goes on to add that, 'what has been had from the Christians came from Syria'.²⁸⁹ Moreover, he saw similarity between the Christian and Islamic scriptures in that he believed that the material drawn from Jewish and Christian sources to be a repetition in nature. As he put it, there are 'many stories which are altogether unnecessary, because they are to be found in the books of the Jews and Christians'.²⁹⁰ Martyn's outlook of the Quran as having an element of repetition from the Christian scripture would have been contrary to that of Zwemer since it could have given greater weight to the Quran, not to mention the clear denial of Christ's divinity, a doctrine perceived to be at the heart of the Christian message.

William Montgomery Watt (1909-2006), a historian, would credit the origin of the Quran in Muhammad as influenced indirectly since 'Muhammad received his knowledge of Biblical conceptions in general... from the intellectual environment of Mecca and not from reading or from the communication of specific individuals'.²⁹¹ Watt argues that the Quran is a product of Muhammad being influenced by Biblical

²⁸⁵ Tisdall, "The Book" of The "People of The Book", 170.

²⁸⁶ Tisdall, *Sources of The Qur'an*, 149.

²⁸⁷ Zwemer, *Islam*, 271, 274. *Moslem World*, 222.

²⁸⁸ Martyn, *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism*, 138.

²⁸⁹ Martyn, *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism*, 138.

²⁹⁰ Martyn, *Controversial Tract*, 113.

²⁹¹ Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, 41.

themes accessible to him but not having encountered those adherents to the Jewish and Christian faiths nor their scriptures. Contemporary scholarship agrees unanimously that the Quran was a product of borrowing as reflected by Watt. Meanwhile, Zwemer emphasised that the content that resulted in Muhammad's encounter with the 'people of the book' was heretical in nature. In addition, we find that Zwemer is in agreement with Geiger's assertion of a Quranic borrowing from Talmudic sources, along with Tisdall's assessment of the account of the gospel being from unorthodox sources. While agreeing with Muir as to Muhammad's role of the origin of the Quran, Zwemer differed in the aspect of Muir's reliance on the Quran as a means of forming a chronology of the life of Muhammad. As for Martyn's approach, Zwemer does not believe in there being repetition in nature with such scriptures but, rather, a distortion.

Zwemer aimed at debunking the Muslim claim of the Quran as being without human influence. Muslims have reacted negatively to such an approach, as highlighted in Jamil Qureshi's rebuke of those who associated the origin of the Quran in any form to that of Muhammad. He went as far as saying: 'nothing could be more horrifying to Muslims than the hoisting up of the prophet onto a Christian pedestal by making him the author of Islam'.²⁹² In line with classic Muslim apologists, Qureshi does not address the clear borrowing that has taken place in the compilation of the Quran, as raised by the likes of Zwemer, but rather argues for the need of sensitivity in engaging such a topic, given that it is offensive to Muslims. Such an inadequate response is not surprising, given that the topic of the Quran is a taboo for Muslims. However, in many instances not much is put forth in defence of the Quran other than to turn to the Quranic injunction to produce a chapter such as found in the Quran (10:38).

In light of this dilemma Watt attempted to show Muslims the possibility of moving forward by forming a dichotomy between the Quran which is the word of God and the Quran that is received. Watt would assert:

²⁹² Qureshi, "Alongsidedness – in Good Faith", 253.

In so far as God is eternal and unchanging, his thought cannot change. Yet in so far as the Quran is God's Word addressed to men, there is nothing inconsistent in supposing a change of emphasis according to the needs of the original hearers at any given time and according to what they were able to accept and understand.²⁹³

Unfortunately, to uphold Watt's proposal would necessitate a significant shift from the original Muslim position of an uncreated Quran, and in turn accepting that the Islamic text is created. The *Mutazilites* were a group that wrestled with such problems and came to the realistic conclusion that the Quran was created. They in turn were labeled heretics: such a fate has been the clear pattern of the Muslim's quest for the origin of the Quran in history.

May we add that as offensive as Zwemer's assessment of the Quran might be to Muslims, he could be considered to hold a conservative view in equating Muhammad as the origin of the Quran. This is unlike recent scholarship of the revisionist school, as led by John Wansbrough, that puts the origin of the Quran to be a later development as an eighth- and ninth-century fabrication.²⁹⁴

Such examination of the sources of the Quran has not been seen in a positive light by Muslims. Tisdall's work on such topics was not received well in its divergence from Islamic orthodoxy. Works of rebuttal by Muslims apologeticists followed that included 'abusive language' directed at the author.²⁹⁵ Such a problem is not discerned in Zwemer, yet we need to put this into the perspective that Zwemer's critical works were directed at a Western readership; this is unlike Tisdall's work *The Sources of Islam* which was first written in Persian primarily for a Muslim audience.

In examining Zwemer's outlook on the source of the Quran, Tisdall and Geiger have been of great influence. This could be interpreted to mean that Zwemer's attempt of incorporating the scholarship of the day into his work was a means of producing substantial findings regarding the sources of the Quran. Zwemer's main concern with

²⁹³ Watt, *Bell's Introduction to The Quran*, 114.

²⁹⁴ See John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scripture Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977).

²⁹⁵ Bennett, *Victorian Images of Islam*, 147.

the Quran was that it distorted to a great degree what was found in Christian scripture. Yet, what would have been at the forefront of Zwemer's mind is the question of whether or not Muhammad had encountered the Christian scripture.

Zwemer considers the Quran's origin to be from a selective use of pagan, Jewish and Christian sources by Muhammad that purposed to serve his interest. Given this, the criteria of examining something as being from God fails with Muhammad in failing to bring a teaching and live a life which reaches the standard of that of Christ as depicted in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, Muhammad would justify all his wrong doing by presupposing that all his actions are permitted by God. It is no surprise that Zwemer saw the Quran as having served the degraded lifestyle of Muhammad, as seen in Chapter 4, as opposed to being a product of divine 'revelation'.

Zwemer viewed the Quran as witnessing to the authority of the Christian scripture yet, due to lack of assessment, it fails in providing an accurate portrayal of Christian teachings. One important aspect of Quranic study for Zwemer is the application of discovering the sources of the Quran as a means of establishing the genuine nature of the Islamic text. We do not discern an original contribution here by Zwemer in looking at the Sources of the Quran because we can see his major points as being traced back to those of Muir, Tisdall and Geiger.

5.8. Conclusion

As a missionary scholar Zwemer was widely read. As reflected in his writings we have seen that evangelical minded writers primarily have influenced if not shaped his outlook of the Quran. In turn, Zwemer would make such findings available to a wider audience, through books, journals and speaking engagements. May we add that such a study of the Quran was received with a great degree of criticism by Muslims. Such a topic is a very sensitive issue for those who view the Quran as of divine origin. Even minor divergences from orthodoxy could label people as apostates. Ultimately,

Muslim scholars will have to engage with contemporary scholarship, which might force them to revise if not abandon the traditional outlook on the Islamic scripture.

In history Christians have opposed the Quran in different ways. Recently we heard of an odd incident involving a Pastor in Florida burning the Quran due to his opposition to its content. Zwemer would have opposed such action, not because of his sympathy towards the Quran, but rather because he would have upheld that the best way to engage with the Quran is by having it translated and available for Muslim readership and having its teaching exposed. Interestingly, in echoing his predecessors, Zwemer first gave a positive view of the style of the Quran, though he later changed his mind on this subject.

Zwemer believed that the Quran gives witness to the genuine nature of the Christian scripture. For this reason Zwemer found it appropriate to refer to the part of the Quran that could be used for the purpose of Christian mission to Muslims. Yet, Zwemer did not view the Quran as being a preparation, but rather a hindrance to salvation in the Christian sense of the word. He also saw it as a shallow and disorganised document which misrepresented previous ‘revelation’ and was the cause for the backwardness he encountered in the Muslim world. The sooner, Zwemer adds, Muslims parted company with it, the better. Zwemer encouraged Muslims to be open minded enough to examine the Christian scripture on its own terms as opposed through the reflection of the Quran. As for the source of the Islamic scripture, Zwemer equated it to be a product of borrowing from Talmudic Judaism, heretical Christian and pagan Arab sources by Muhammad and for his purpose. For these reasons Zwemer described the differences present between the Quran and the Christian scripture in an apocalyptic manner when he asserts:

The Apostles began the Battle of the Books. It will end until the Word of God rides triumphant at Armageddon, and the kingdoms of the world become the Kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ. Then all the other sacred books will be “wood, hay, stubble,” but “the word of God abideth forever.”²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Zwemer, *The Cross Above the Crescent*, 225.

6. Zwemer's Assessment of Islamic Reformers

6.1. Introduction

Islam reformed is Islam no longer. Lord Cromer

We have explored Zwemer's view on Muhammad and the Quran in some depth. Among other things we have noticed Zwemer's emphasis that a move towards the Quran is a sign of regression while a move away from the book of Islam as a sign of progression. Zwemer linked the backwardness of the Muslims world to the prophet and book of Islam. In this chapter we will examine Zwemer's perception of Muslim reformers and whether he would see them as progressive or regressive in their engagement with Muhammad and the Quran.

Zwemer started his missionary work at a time when *Dar Al-Islam* was under Western rule and the consequent independence of such countries, as we will find, Zwemer would view proponent of 'new Islam' to be much needed in the Muslim world. He would view Ahmed Khan to exemplify an ideal advocate of 'new Islam', because he wanted to improve society and he was willing to study the Christian scriptures. However, we will be touching the relevant topic of radical Muslim reformers and will examine whether or not he conformed to the opinion of the time that the only way that Muslim reformers would follow would be along progressive lines. Moreover, we are going to examine Muhammad ibn abd al Wahhab, one individual Zwemer had special interest, in having reformed Islam along the radical lines.

6.2. Moving away from Muhammad and the Quran

Zwemer was encouraged with the presence of progressive Muslim²⁹⁷ reformers in the Muslim world, which he categorised as 'new Islam'. He believed such emergence was due to Muslim dissatisfaction with the state of the Islamic world and the standard as prescribed by the prophet of Islam. As he put it:

The new Islam is not only a revolt against tradition because of its ritualism and mediaeval

²⁹⁷ Not to be confused with recent group formed in the US with the same name. See www.progressivemuslims.org

beliefs and practices; it is also a moral revolt against the ethical standards of Mohammed and his companions, as recorded in tradition.²⁹⁸

It seems that, Zwemer viewed Muhammad as a part of the problem and a possible reason for a lack of progress found in the Muslim world. He finds it ironic that Muslims are not willing to examine the very thing that is keeping them in a backward state; we will see in section 6.3.1. He stated:

It is interesting to observe that whatever cargo is thrown overboard by the new Islam in their attempts to save the ship, no one is ever tempted to suggest a new captain. Whatever Moslems of the new school reject, they remain loyal to the prophetship of Mohammed.²⁹⁹

As we will try to explore further, for Zwemer the proposed ‘new captain’ is Jesus Christ. He believed that Muslims should look up to Christ and it would enable them to bring the Muslim world to a much needed reformation. Zwemer looked at proponent of ‘new Islam’ who aim to bring positive change in society. He saw their ideas and morals as those exceeding the example of Muhammad, his life and moral standards. Zwemer would affirm that:

The character of the Prophet is becoming a stumbling-block to all earnest thinkers, and there are hundreds of thousands of Mohammedans whose social and moral ideals are higher than those of Mohammed himself.³⁰⁰

While reflecting on the Islamic confession of faith, Zwemer would drive his point further stating that ‘The second article of the Moslem creed is held with fanatic devotion even by those who have themselves progressed far beyond his attainments, socially and morally.’³⁰¹ The Modernist Shaykh Khuda Bakhsh confirms Zwemer’s observation that Muslims in practice are moving away from the source of the religion. For example, in highlighting the fundamentals of the Islamic faith, Bakhsh failed to mention Muhammad or the Quran when he stated:

Such is the true spirit of Islam. Universalism is its key; the unity of God its battlecry; the brotherhood of man its cardinal tenet; a will to conquer its aspiration. The rest is the creation of theology and not essential to Islam.³⁰²

²⁹⁸ Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 171.

²⁹⁹ Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 174.

³⁰⁰ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 216.

³⁰¹ Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 174.

³⁰² Ferrar, ‘India’, 202.

Such lack of engagement with the prophet and scripture of Islam could be interpreted as revision of the religion. However, orthodox Islam would give an exalted position to the prophet of Islam, he is the perfect example to be assimilated and the Quran being of divine edict.

Zwemer believed that women and children should be a primary area of active engagement for advocate of 'new Islam'. In his work *Childhood in the Moslem world* (1915), Zwemer's concern at heart is for the welfare and education of children. In reflecting on the treatment of women in the Muslim world, he would state:

In social life the position of womanhood has naturally attracted the attention of the new Islam. Advocates of monogamy, the abolition of the veil, and the evil of divorce.³⁰³

In reflecting on the efforts of advocate of 'new Islam' engagement with the sciences as a means of prolonging life and advancement of society, Zwemer would ask:

Will it be possible "to march with the current" and continue to hold the teaching of the Koran and the Traditions? The present condition of the Mohammedan world answers that question emphatically in the negative.³⁰⁴

Indeed the relationship between the Quran and science is problematic. For example, this very tension would cause Farhan Qureshi, a leading Islamic apologist, to reject Islam. He argued that:

My apostasy [from Islam has been] ...based on a realization that Islam is in direct contradiction with contemporary knowledge involving and including science, philosophy, ethics, anthropology, and the field which I am most interested [psychology].³⁰⁵

Zwemer has some strong views on Muhammad and the Quran, though he believed in the possibility of progress among Muslims. Some would even think that Zwemer appreciated Islam, for example John Hubers misunderstood Zwemer. He thought that Zwemer values

³⁰³ Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 162.

³⁰⁴ Zwemer, *Islam*, 182.

³⁰⁵ Farhan Qureshi, 'I Declare My Apostasy' www.faithfreedom.org/articles/apostates-of-islam/i-declare-my-apostasy/ 11 Oct 2012.

Islam because Zwemer encouraged cooperation with advocate of ‘new Islam’ as a means of bringing social change and setting higher ethical standards. After reflecting on Zwemer’s outlook of proponent of ‘new Islam’, Hubers would claim:

[Zwemer] reluctance to say what he had said numerous times before—that Islam has had a wholly negative effect on the lives of those who come under its sway. For the first time Zwemer openly and freely admits to positive contributions made by this “greatest of all non-Christian faiths,” making its valuation much more complex than he had originally assumed. In this context he approvingly mentions current Islamic reform movements... saying that those who were caught up in these movements could be considered allies with Christians in their desire to bring social and ethical reform to their societies. This signals an end to Zwemer’s earlier assertion that the only hope for the Muslim world is the radical displacement of Islam. He now openly admits that Muslims working within the confines of their Islamic worldview can be the source of positive societal changes.³⁰⁶

Hubers would attempt to reinterpret Zwemer in light of the ecumenical spirit of the present day, as opposed to presenting a fair depiction of Zwemer. He conflates Zwemer’s view of Muslims as people with Islam as religion. Huber is mistaken in claiming that there was a discrepancy in Zwemer’s early and later work regarding advocate of ‘new Islam’. For example, Zwemer has spoken favourably of Khan as we will see in section 6.3.1. in his earlier as well as later writings. Zwemer spoke favourably of Khan in his first major work *Arabia: Crescent of Islam* (1900). It seems to contradict a statement Huber has made about a shift.

6.2.1. Moving toward Christ

Zwemer would point out that Muslims that are impressed by the higher standard are attracted to the teaching and influence of Christianity. He would affirm:

No stronger testimony concerning the failure of Moslem ethics was ever given than by these leaders of the new Islam in their advocacy of higher standards based upon Christianity. When they cannot find these ideals in the Koran, they borrow them from the New Testament.³⁰⁷

Zwemer would equate the higher standard Muslims found to be attractive in the west to ethics and morality that originated from Christian teaching. He would see the commonality between Christians and progressive Muslims along the humanitarian lines. He explains that ‘advocates

³⁰⁶ Hubers, *Samuel Zwemer and The Challenge of Islam*, 120.

³⁰⁷ Zwemer, *Childhood in the Moslem World*, 191.

of the New Islam are our allies in all questions of social reform and in the raising of new ethical standards'.³⁰⁸ Zwemer would repeat himself later in his life only to add:

The impact of Western civilization through commerce, literature, and Western governments has utterly disintegrated old social standards, practices and ideals among educated Moslems, and is compelling them to readjust their faith in the Koran, or abandon it.³⁰⁹

Yet, Zwemer would make it clear that his aim is not in westernizing but rather evangelising Muslims. In one of his last books, Zwemer wrote that he would question the advancement that 'new Islam' would show towards the gospel. He notes that: '[a]way from Muhammad does not always mean back to Christ'.³¹⁰ This seems to explain why Zwemer raise a question of perception of Jesus Christ among the adherents of 'new Islam'. As a missionary to Muslims, Zwemer's main concern did not rest on social regeneration but rather on 'inner regeneration'. It is in such an important topic that Zwemer finds no difference between 'new Islam' and traditional Islam. As he put it:

The main question even as regards the new Islam is not how much nearer they have come to Christian ethics and Christian civilisation in their attempts to reform the old system, but it is the old question, "what think ye of the Christ?"... the followers of the new Islam may speak in the highest terms of Jesus Christ as regards His character. His miracles, and His influence on history, they occupy the orthodox position in this respect; nor do they find a place in their doctrine of salvation for Christ's atonement.³¹¹

Proponents of 'new Islam' were open to Christian ethics but not necessarily open to the Christian message. However, Zwemer primary concern was the preaching of the gospel that would bring true higher standards and reforms, not just getting closer to Christian ethics and civilisation based on Christian principle.

6.3. Muslim reformers in line with Christian reformers

Zwemer hoped that Muslims would reform by moving away from the Quran and *sunna* of Muhammad. Unfortunately, Zwemer has not elaborated on further steps on how to bring reform

³⁰⁸ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 219. Zwemer, *Childhood in The Moslem World*, 219.

³⁰⁹ Zwemer, *The Call to Prayer*, 22.

³¹⁰ Zwemer, *The Cross Above The Crescent*, 110.

³¹¹ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 173,228.

to Islam. In his writing Zwemer would encourage Muslims to engage with the Christian scripture, though he does not present a systematic picture of a way to reform Islam. At the same time Zwemer expressed his concern about the direction that reformation would take in Islam: ‘[y]et our review of the New Islam and its future may well conclude by reminding our-selves of the scientific fact that hybrids do not propagate’.³¹² Even as far back as the 19th century we find that some were hoping that Islam could reform along modernist lines. As poet and essayist with a personal encounter of the Muslim world, Wilfred Blunt would write in *The Future of Islam* (1882):

I expressed my conviction that Islam would in the end work out her salvation.... Her reformation is indeed already begun, and may be gradually carried to its full results, by no violent means, and in a progressive, not a reactionary spirit.³¹³

It has been observed that Progressives have seen the Christian reformation of the 16th century as a role model and as a paradigm worth simulating. That is, by going back to the sources and rejecting any later developments it was hoped that the Muslim world would blossom just as it was the case with Christianity.³¹⁴ For example, Ali Shariati (1933-1975), an Iranian sociologist, would address the backwardness witnessed in the Muslim world and attempted to simulate the West in its scientific advancement while still holding on to Islam.³¹⁵ For Shariati the progress witnessed in the West was due to the new thinking of Protestantism that in turn brought a shift from the dark ages. As he viewed it:

We are concerned here with culture, with thought and the scientific movement, and it is for this reason that we regard the change in methodology as the fundamental factor in the renaissance.³¹⁶

More recently there has been a call for ‘protestant Islam’. Bassam Tahhan, Professor of Arabic based in France, has called for moving away from Islamic tradition and for reinterpreting the Quran as a means of reforming Islam in the light of present advancement.³¹⁷ It is interesting that Shariati and Tahhan did not put into consideration a return to the original sources because it

³¹² Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 178.

³¹³ Wilfred, *The Future of Islam*, 44.

³¹⁴ ISIC Briefing 8 January 2003 Voices For Moderation & Reform Within Islam: The Call for an Islamic Protestant Reformation.

³¹⁵ Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 103-105.

³¹⁶ Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, 58.

³¹⁷ Bassam Tahhan. ‘Je plaide pour un islam protestant’ www.telquel-online.com/229/maroc7_229.shtml 1May 2011.

does not equate to progress in the sciences nor technological advancement. In contrast, Christian reformation and return to the scripture produced the spirit of enquiry and advancement. Blunt and others who encountered Islam and its shortcomings first hand would possibly have in mind the notion that Islam would follow in the footsteps of reformed Christianity. Interestingly, Zwemer would refer to Blunt's work but he did not draw much from the in-depth evaluation of the nature of reformation in the Muslim world.

Unlike Shariati and Tahhan, Zwemer believed that moving away from the Islamic sources was part of the solution for the backwardness encountered in the Muslim world. Zwemer viewed the New Testament to be a far better example for a progressive and humanitarian society as opposed to that found in the Quran. It is for such a reason that he would claim that the best part of 'new Islam' is due to the influence of Christianity. Understandably, Zwemer's singling out the New Testament instead of referring to both Old and New Testament is due to the belief that the Old has been superseded with the New. Moreover, Zwemer was correct in observing that it was proponent of 'new Islam' that would aim to lift the status of women and children in the Muslim world; this is because radicals that are in line with orthodox Islam would move an opposite direction thus be oppressive and cruel to such groups of people. It is for such reason Zwemer was attracted to the work of Ahmed Khan, to which we now turn to.

6.3.1. Ahmed Khan

Zwemer viewed Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) as an initiator of progressive Islam.³¹⁸ Born in India, he was an Islamic reformer and modernist thinker hoping to save Islam from what he viewed to be the ever-increasing marginalisation of Muslims in British-ruled India. For such reason, he founded the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (India) later to be called Aligarh Muslim University.

The school was designed for providing modern education for Muslims by modelling the Cambridge University, that Khan visited during his time in England. He was seen as an

³¹⁸ Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 145.]

‘educational reformer by the small class of English-educated Muslims and as a religious heretic by the orthodox ‘Ulema’’,³¹⁹

As impressed as Zwemer was with Khan’s efforts of reform, he questioned the spiritual value of such higher education in that it lacked in its portrayal of the concept of the divine in the minds of its students. Zwemer stated:

the tone of the [Anglo-Oriental] college is agnostic rather than Moslem and secular rather than religious. This was the testimony given me by the two resident professors of Moslem theology and was also my own impression after meeting the students.³²⁰

Zwemer’s criticism is not limited to the institution founded by Khan; very similar concern could be expressed about Western universities at this time. It may be noted that the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College reflects the Western influence of enlightenment in contrast to the Islamic education grounded in the *tafsir* and *hadith*. Yet, Zwemer would see Khan as being the much-needed breakthrough in giving the Christian scriptures the attention it deserved. This is because Khan disassociated himself from Indian Muslims that claimed the Old and New Testament was corrupt.³²¹ As Zwemer viewed it:

Syed Ahmad [Khan] did not believe that the Christians had corrupted the text of the Old and New Testament. On the contrary he began to publish a commentary on Genesis, of which one volume has been printed.³²²

As a missionary to Muslims and one that attempted to have the Christian scriptures available to Muslims, Zwemer would have seen Khan’s interest in the Christian scripture in a positive light. This comes especially in the light of Muslims’ unwillingness to engage with the Old and New Testaments following the Islamic doctrine of *tahrif* a claim that this scripture had been corrupted. Yet, as we have seen earlier, Zwemer did not find advocate of ‘new Islam’ open to the ‘gospel’ message. However, Khan’s effort of engaging with the Christian scriptures was ground breaking. It is for such a reason that we could propose that Zwemer would have welcomed cautiously Khan’s effort.

³¹⁹ Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, v.

³²⁰ Zwemer, *Islam*, 180.

³²¹ Moaddel and Talattof, *Modernist and Fundamentalist debates in Islam*, 8.

³²² Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 148.

In evaluating Khan's view on the Quran, Zwemer would go as far as to claim that, for Khan, the Islamic scripture 'contained human elements as well as divine'.³²³ This goes further than Khan's outlook since, for Khan, the Quran would be considered to be wholly from God. However, reason should be applied as a means of making sense of the problematic passages.³²⁴ It is not surprising that Zwemer emphasised the human element of the Quran as portrayed by Khan because, in praxis, there are many ways in which Khan explains away difficult passages; a problem which should not have existed had the Quran been perfect as claimed by Muslims.

As we see, in the effort of defending Islam from the challenges faced by modernity, Khan would try to make Islam compatible with modernity. As Khan puts it:

Today we are as before in need of a modern *'ilm al kalam* by which we should either refute the doctrines of the modern world or undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with the articles of Islamic faith.³²⁵

Mortimer makes it clear that, in reality, Khan has shifted so far away from the midpoint that he makes Islam unrecognisable. He would add:

[Khan was one of the] modern Muslim reformers who were founded on a correct understanding of Islam, but to attempt to justify this by a wholesale and deliberate revision of traditional Islamic theology. He re-read the Koran in the light of nineteenth-century western science, and concluded that there was no contradiction between the two. Revelation and natural law were identical: 'Islam is nature, and Nature is Islam.'³²⁶

Khan forbade Islamic controversial institutions, such as the slave trade (Surah 33:50) and polygamy (Surah 4:3), though their find their origin in the Quran and the *sunna* of Muhammad. Is seems to indicate that contrary to Islamic orthodoxy, he did not believe that the Quran is relevant in every context. Khan is a good example of what Zwemer categorized as Muslims that have been influenced by the West, and who in turn would attempt to modernise Islam. That is, for Zwemer Muslims that have encountered Western education would be prone to reform and to change society for the better. He would state that 'those who became enamoured of Western civilization, was inevitably an intellectual revolt against the old Islam.... [which] gave birth to

³²³ Zwemer, *The disintegration of Islam*, 149.

³²⁴ Janin, *The Pursuit of Learning in the Islam World*, 141.

³²⁵ Cited in Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 301.

³²⁶ Mortimer, *Faith and power: The politics of Islam*, 101.

the New Islam.³²⁷ Here Zwemer talks about Khan and the like; because Khan encountered Western education, he would attempt to reform Islam.

Zwemer objected a possibility of progress whilst holding to the Quran as being of divine origin and Muhammad as an example worthy of imitation (Surah 33:21). He believed that such movements emerged due to the dissatisfaction with the religion itself.

Advocate of 'new Islam' claim to imitate Muhammad but in reality they have found him to be a stumbling block (e.g. Islam works against the emancipation of women). This is because proponents of the 'new Islam' have superseded the low moral standard as set by Muhammad with a higher standard for women and children. It is along such humanitarian lines that Zwemer would see the possibility in working with proponent of 'new Islam'. At the same time, he asserted that such advancement may be possible under the influence of Christianity. Zwemer upheld that the state should not dictate the church and vice-versa, that is why he was encouraged by advocates of 'new Islam' in establishing the separation of religion and state. However, as a missionary to Muslims Zwemer was more concerned with the lack of 'openness to the gospel' among proponent of 'New Islam' just as among the traditional reformers. At the same time, Zwemer found Khan's commentary of the Bible to be an encouraging development and a move to the right direction.

However, he fails to mention the short lifespan of such a project since Khan's commentary on Genesis progressed only to chapter 11, a mere one fifth of the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, such commentary was but one of three volumes Khan wrote on the Bible; the other two were on the 'general matters of inspiration and textual criticism' and partial commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.³²⁸ Such omission by Zwemer makes it probable that he was not fully aware of Khan's commentary on the Bible. In view of the much-established Muslim accusation of the corruption of the Christian scripture. Zwemer would have used Khan's appraisal of the incorruptible nature of the Bible to further highlight to Muslims the genuine nature of such scripture. Interestingly, those who wrote on Khan commentary on the Christian scripture did not

³²⁷ Zwemer, *Islam*, 179.

³²⁸ Guenther, 'Christian Responses to Ahmad Khan's Commentary on the Bible', 73.

fail to mention the first work Khan's wrote which was on matters of inspiration and higher criticism on the Bible.³²⁹

6.4. Zwemer and Fundamentalist Reformers

Zwemer's contemporary missionaries did not give much attention to pan-Islamism, instead they were optimistic that such a movement would be replaced by pan-nationalism and 'modernism'.³³⁰ Writing in the mid thirties and reflecting on pioneering advocate of 'new Islam' in Cairo, Arthur Jeffery would conclude wrongly that '[p]an-Islam is dead'.³³¹ Mott, who was a fellow missionary of Zwemer's, would affirm that '[m]uch of the old bigotry and fanaticism have gone.... Many workers bear testimony that no longer do they encounter the proud, self-satisfied Islam which they knew before.'³³²

Zwemer would envision a reformed Islam along the lines of that of Ahmed Khan; however, he was also aware of the presence of fundamentalist Muslim reformers. At a time when many were saying that radical Islam was in a dying stage, he warned of the lingering danger of fundamentalism. As Zwemer put it:

The conservatives have as their watchword "Back to Mohammed!" They hope to reinvigorate the old religion by a return to the golden age.³³³

Zwemer seems to allude to; radical thinkers such as Hassan al Banna (1906-1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, and his successor Sayid Qutb (1906-1966). These were the ideological voices for radical Islam. He does not refer to them as such, but a study of their teaching may suggest what he was speaking against. Al Banna aimed to reform Islam by returning to the 'golden age' of Islam – following the example of Muhammad and the political

³²⁹ See: John H. Pratt, *Scripture and Science not at Variance; with Remarks on the Historical Character, Plenary Inspiration, and Surpassing Importance, of the Earlier Chapters of Genesis* (London:Thomas Hatchard) 1859; G. E. L. Cotton, *A Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese and Province of Calcutta*. (Calcutta:Bishops College Press) 1863; John Murdoch, *Indian Missionary Manual: Hints to Young Missionaries in India; with Lists of Books*. (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday) 1870; T. J. Scott, 'The Problem of Islam,' *Indian Evangelical Review* 27, (Jan 1901) 257-275; Edward Sell, 'Muhammadan Exegesis of the Quran and the Traditions' *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 28 (Oct. 1879): 735-7. Not all listed here were missionaries but have made contribution to the discussion.

³³⁰ Pikkert, *Protestant Mission to the Middle East*, 124.

³³¹ Arthur, Jeffery, 'Three Cairo Modernists' p.498.

³³² Mott IRM 1924:324.

³³³ Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 29.

unity of the first caliphs. He believed it was founded on ‘excellent Qur’anic social organization’.³³⁴ Qutb would follow al Banna while going even further and making even more radical statements, such as calling the contemporary Islamic world un-Islamic (*jahiliya*). Having studied in the US in the 1940s he felt disillusioned with what he viewed as the immorality of the West.³³⁵ Contrary to Khan who would attempt to incorporate Western advancement in India, Qutb was on the other side of the spectrum; he rejected western progress and attempted to reform Islam through returning to its sources. He stated:

Islam proposes independent solutions to human problems.... Islam is a comprehensive philosophy and a homogeneous unity and to introduce into it any foreign elements would mean its ruins.³³⁶

Zwemer would have seen Qutb’s approach of reforming Islam by returning to the source of the religion not as a solution but rather a part of a problem.

6.4.1. Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab

Zwemer viewed Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703-1792) to be one that has reformer Islam along the radical lines and envisioned the return to the source of the religion.³³⁷ Born in Uyaynah (in modern day Saudi Arabia), Abd al Wahhab has memorized the whole Quran before the age of ten and went the *hajj* as a young teenager.³³⁸ Abd al Wahhab called for the return to the fundamentals of Islam – the Quran and Hadith – believing it to be the ‘only infallible and authoritative sources of scripture’.³³⁹ He declared a war on those who opposed his effort of reform Arabia and viewed Muslims who different in their theology to be ‘outside the pale of Islam altogether’.³⁴⁰ He forbade Muslims from visiting Saint’s shrines but advocated its destruction.³⁴¹ Abd al Wahhab and his followers prefer the term *salafi* (a follower of the ‘first

³³⁴ Hasan Al-Banna. 1978. *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna* (1906-1949), 17-18.

³³⁵ Sullivan, ‘Muslim Brotherhood’, 188.

³³⁶ Ahmed, *Social Justice in Islam*, 117.

³³⁷ Zwemer, *Islam*, 151.

³³⁸ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 18.

³³⁹ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 42.

³⁴⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, vi.

³⁴¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 16.

Muslim ancestors') or *muwahhid* ('one who professes god's unity') as opposed to being labelled 'Wahhabi'.³⁴²

Zwemer reflecting on al Abd al Wahhab's efforts to reforming Islam by going back to its sources as follows:

There is no doubt that Abd-ul-Wahab honestly tried to bring about a reform and that in many of the points enumerated his reform was strictly a return to primitive Islam.³⁴³

However, Zwemer viewed such return to the sources of the religion a recipe for disaster. In a section entitled 'The Social Bankruptcy of Islam' Zwemer explains that:

A system forever handicapped in any effort toward social progress by the incubus of such gigantic evils [murder in jihad, polygamy, simple divorce, slavery] as sanctioned in their Prophet's life and in his book, could not escape social Islam has been on trial for thirteen centuries.³⁴⁴

Zwemer viewed Abd al Wahhab as one who reenacted the violence of Muhammad that can be found in the Islamic sources to spread the religion. He believed:

[Wahhab] teaching was based on the Koran and the early traditions; his word was founding the desert of Arabia and his followers fought, as did the companions of the Prophet, to destroy all infidels.³⁴⁵

Moreover, he viewed Abd al Wahhab as the one who sanctions the validity of religious war in the present. Zwemer affirms that Wahhab 'believe jihad, or religious war, is not out of date, but incumbent on believers everywhere.'³⁴⁶ However, Zwemer would underestimate the subsequent influence of Wahhabism. He highlights that 'the history of the sect [Wahhabism] shows that a reformation of the Moslem world by a return to primitive Islam (in theory and practice) is an impossibility, even when aided by the sword.'³⁴⁷ Zwemer did not foresee the expansion of Wahhabism from the 1970s onwards throughout the Islamic world and beyond thanks to the petrodollars.

³⁴² Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, vi.

³⁴³ Zwemer, *Arabia*, 193.

³⁴⁴ Zwemer, *Islam*, 129.

³⁴⁵ Zwemer, *Islam*, 150.

³⁴⁶ Zwemer, *Islam*, 151.

³⁴⁷ Zwemer, *Disintegration*, 77.

Unlike Abd al Wahhab who promoted changing society through religion war, Zwemer would reject the use of violence. He would see the ‘kingdom of God’ to be a spiritual kingdom (Matt 18:20) and would have objected to the method deployed by the crusaders approach for spreading Christianity.

Zwemer believed Abd al Wahhab to be a true reformer – he has gone to the sources of Islam; and he would see Wahhabism as the consequence of such an approach. Moreover, Zwemer would see Abd al Wahhab claim as a consequence of giving Muhammad and the Islamic scripture the undeserved attention and exalted position. He believed such self-destructive thinking is what is hindering the Muslim world from advancing and Abd al Wahhab vision to be disastrous. For such reason, Zwemer saw a move towards Muhammad as a sign of regressing and a move away from Muhammad as a sign of progressing.

Apostates from Islam

Zwemer’s appraisal of reformers such as Ahmed Khan did not stop him from addressing the danger of radicals. Firstly, their prescription of the death sentence to those who leave Islam, in accordance with the four school of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), would be highly problematic. Zwemer’s whole life entailed evangelism to Muslims as a means of converting them to Christianity. In *The Law of Apostasy in Islam* (1923) Zwemer presents stories of Christian converts from Islam to show how Islamic law has a stronghold over the lived of Muslim converts. He dedicates a whole chapter to examine passages from the Quran that deals with apostasy and the ways they are interpreted in Muslim commentaries.

Zwemer would diagnose that the problem has originated with the teaching of Muhammad that it still has bearing in the present. He would assert:

Every convert to Christianity is an apostate from Islam, and although there have been apostates throughout all the centuries, and we know of cases even during the life-time of Mohammed the Prophet, the law of apostasy has become fixed in Islam, and for thirteen centuries has exercised its dread, if not its power, under all conditions and in every land.³⁴⁸

Zwemer found it frustrating how difficult it is for people to leave Islam. He would state:

³⁴⁸ Zwemer, *The Law of Apostasy in Islam*, 17.

Islam, from the earliest times and according to the teaching of the Koran, has always made it ... extremely difficult for those who once enter its fold to find exit. It is not an exaggeration to say that the doors of this vast temple reared by the Arabian Prophet swing only inward, not outward. Like a cunning trap, everything yields to the slightest pressure from without, but these very yielding doors are securely barred and barbed to lacerate those who attempt escape.³⁴⁹

At a time when hopes were high that advocates of ‘new Islam’ would bring a renaissance to the Muslim world, Zwemer would highlight that things were not as they seemed in the light of those that would attempt to reform Islam along fundamentalist lines. This would affect directly Christian missionary work among Muslims as then the death sentence would be implemented for those who would attempt to leave Islam.

Zwemer didn’t welcome radicals and believed that they would become a hindrance not only to the Christian mission work but also to the very development of the Muslim world. It may hinder the development of open society and upholding the women’s rights and the rights of minorities. It goes without saying that the more a country follows the hard line interpretation, the more likely it will oppose the Christian mission; it is also more likely to enforce a death sentence to the apostates (Saudi Arabia a case in point). Interestingly, we find commonality and divergence between radicals and Zwemer, since both equally believed their message had the potential of raising the moral standard of a nation and, in turn, transform a society. However, radicals would find it paramount to resist the very thing Zwemer viewed to be foundational to his work: Christian mission to Muslims.

Zwemer’s first-hand encounter with the Muslim world had given him an insight of the intricate nature of progress. It is for such reason that Zwemer would warn of the danger of the radicals, hoping for the end of scripturalist Islam that had choked its followers by its literal interpretation of the Quran. Zwemer believed that there was no hope in Islam. He reflects on Wahhabism as follows:

The present intellectual, social and moral condition of the old Wahabi empire, Central Arabia, is sufficient commentary on the fact that even a Reformed Islam cannot save or elevate people. There

³⁴⁹ Zwemer, *The Law of Apostasy in Islam*, 18.

is no hope , for Arabia at least, in Islam. It has been tried for thirteen hundred years and signally failed. The Wahabis and their history only emphasize the fact. Nor has there been a permanent moral or social reformation of Islam in any land since the day of its origin. It is a hopeless system. [Zwemer, *Islam*, 152.]

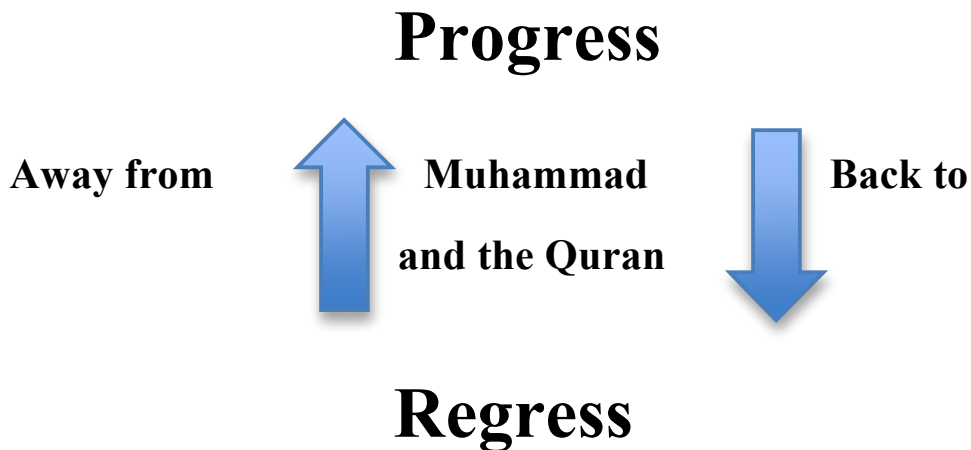
However, when it comes to the Christian faith, Zwemer would defend the very principle he rejected in Islam i.e. back to its sources, back to Jesus Christ, believing that here is a far better example than that found with Muhammad. Zwemer would assert: ‘*Back to Christ*, not back to Mohammed – that is the only hope for the Moslem world.’³⁵⁰ Zwemer believed that Christianity works the opposite way i.e. reforms are achieved by going back to Jesus Christ and the Christian scripture. This is a position Zwemer takes when he calls Muslims towards reformation in order to bring about a progressive Muslim world. It is possible that Zwemer’s vision of seeing Muslims convert to Christianity could have lead him to such a conclusion since Zwemer is advocating the missionary view of the lack of hope found in Islam and, in turn, advocating the hope found in Christianity.

For Zwemer advocates of ‘new Islam’ are so detached from Islamic orthodoxy that their message is one of a compromise when they attempt to portray an acceptable depiction of Islam and Islamic scripture. As one who was active in the controversy between conservatism and liberalism within Christianity in the 1930s Zwemer was at the forefront of resisting the radical reinterpretation of mission in viewing it to be nothing short of humanistic optimism. In the book *Thinking Missions With Christ* (1934) Zwemer would highlight the uniqueness of the gospel message vis-a-vis other ideologies. As a conservative Christian and one that upheld the authority of scripture, he would see liberal Christianity and the shift from orthodoxy as a great threat to Christianity. Similarly, radical Muslim reformers would see efforts of such reformers as Khan to be a distortion of the true teaching of Islam. For example, Khan’s effort at eisegesis of the Quran in the light of scientific progress would be totally rejected by the radicals, as exemplified by Qutb’s work entitled *In The Shade of The Quran* (1951-1965) where Qutb attempted to exegete the Quran for the present context.

³⁵⁰ Zwemer, *Disintegration*, 77.

We can find parallelism with the Abd al Wahhab's view of *Islamic state* and Zwemer's perception of the kingdom of God. While in general terms Zwemer would have argued for 'Christian civilisation', in reality he would have seen faith to be a personal matter as opposed to one that could be propagated or maintained through the state. Zwemer would have found it paradoxical that radicals would be attached to the very thing that progressives have been running away from.

Furthermore, Zwemer's biggest reservation was about the Sharia law as it would bring a biggest hindrance to the Christian mission. Lastly, Zwemer would have found it highly encouraging that progressives had achieved a higher moral standard to that achieved by Muhammad himself. Likewise, we could propose that he would have seen the radicals' efforts of returning to Muhammad and the prescription of his ways in the present context extremely problematic.



6.5. Conclusion

Zwemer would have felt a commonality with proponents of 'new Islam' in their efforts to modernize the Muslim world rather than with the radicals. He encouraged the efforts of transforming society by progressives, as they have been struggling to overcome the backwardness and fatalism in the Muslim world. While questioning the longevity of such a movement, Zwemer was the voice that spoke on behalf of progressives. At the same time, Zwemer would have proposed a move away from Islamic sources, as a solution; he believed that Muhammad and Islamic sources should not be a model that proponents of 'new Islam' should attempt to simulate. On the contrary, it should be rejected in the same manner they have rejected the source of Islam in practice. Zwemer believed that going back to Jesus Christ moving away from Muhammad is a solution of the social and spiritual decay in the Muslim world. Zwemer does not seem to engage with the main Muslim reformers; it is for this reason we do not find him addressing Jamal al Din al Afghani (1838-1897) and Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905) who were widely-known reformers. However, he goes against the current in reflecting on the danger of radicals at a time when there was overwhelming optimism that Muslims would reform along progressive lines. He viewed Abd al Wahhab vision of returning to the sources as a bringing hindrance to the advancement of the Muslim world. Objections to radicals are twofold; the difficulty they would bring to Christian missionary work among Muslims and the hindrance they would bring to advancement in the Muslim world.

Zwemer's recommendation of a 'new captain' for Islam would be a call for Muslims to replace Muhammad with Jesus Christ as an example worth imitating. This will lead Zwemer to see Khan's commentary of Genesis as a move towards the much-needed development of the Muslim study of Jesus Christ as found in the Christian scriptures. Zwemer would encourage Muslims to study the Christian scriptures on its own terms as opposed to reflecting on Christian theology through the lens of the Quran. He would see Khan essentially opening the door in contrast to those who would upheld the death penalty for apostates. Nevertheless, he did not see progressives to differ significantly from the traditional Muslims when it comes to the rejection of the Christian message. Though Zwemer endorsed the reformation efforts along the humanitarian lines, his main concern as a missionary was for Muslims to come to Christian

faith. To conclude, by taking history into account one can construe that Zwemer has an unrealistic vision of a reformed Muslim world achieved by moving away from Muhammad and the Quran. It seems that there has been a constant return to the model of the prophet of Islam par excellence throughout Islamic history. It can be seen in a shift from the Mutazilite rationalism in the 10th and 11th century towards the Hanbal principles. Another example is a recent victory of Mohammed Morsi, a presidential candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood (an Islamic movement founded by al-Banna) in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood is known for its motto 'The prophet is our leader; the Quran is our law.' Therefore, such incidences might lead us to suggest when Muslims undertake reformation for their religion; it should be taken with a pinch of salt.

7. Conclusion

Nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries to Muslims have greatly influenced Zwemer. Among them are Henry Martyn, Karl Pfander, William Muir and Thomas Valpy French as well as Raymond Lull. He aimed to deliver the baton he had received from his mentors and predecessors to younger missionaries. By doing this, he hoped to see the fulfilment of the Great Commission among Muslims. Preparation for missionary work included the study of the religion Muslims follow, through books and anthropological reflection. Zwemer aimed for the greater understanding of Islam and the impact it has on its followers. He first encountered Islam while studying under Dr John G. Lansing, at the New Brunswick Seminary. Thirty years later he became a professor of missions in Princeton Theological Seminary [1929], and he was in a better place to reflect on the Prophet of Islam and the Quran.

Zwemer found it foundational to separate Islam the religion from Muslims the people. He was aware of the taboo nature of the topic of Muhammad and the Quran for Muslims. For such a reason, he advised those engaging with Muslims to 'move with caution and speak

with sympathy'.³⁵¹ Zwemer had deep concern for Muslims and their wellbeing. He paid a high-price during his missionary work in Arabia, where his two young daughters died due to the difficult terrain and the lack of medical care. His personal encounters with the Muslim world led him to have a distinct approach to the missiological strategy towards Islam. Since his focus did not rest mostly in 'orthodox' Islam, a common feature of western scholarship, but also on the Islam which is practiced by majority of Muslims – folk Islam.

Zwemer's writing on Islam primarily addressed Western and Christian audiences, which gave him the liberty to use highly critical works on Islam. He took a confrontational approach in his study of Islam by following a critical approach to the study of Muhammad and the Quran. He attempted to present the Muhammad of history as opposed to the Muhammad as revered in Islam. Such approach resonates immensely with the Quest of the Historical Jesus that began in the 18th century and aimed, through historical methods, to reconstruct a supportable account of the life of Jesus.

Nevertheless, Zwemer does not go in great depth in addressing Muhammad other than to engage with the prophet of Islam in a thematic fashion. Zwemer's engagement was not aimed at demonising or providing a derogatory interpretation of the Islamic prophet. Rather, he aimed to do a critical study as a means of obtaining an accurate account of the Islamic religion. The study of Islam was a lifelong endeavour for Zwemer, and we find it evolving throughout his overview of the religion. He influenced Christians in general profoundly and missionaries' view of Islam particularly, through his speaking, writing and working as an editor of the *Moslem World* journal.

Importantly, Zwemer played a leading role in mobilising missionary work among Muslims at the Edinburgh conference (1910) which called for a greater cooperation among Protestants missionaries. The motto of the conference was 'The Evangelization of the World in This Generation'. However, the two World Wars undermined close cooperation among missionaries. Plus, liberalism in the churches would question the

³⁵¹Zwemer, *The Cross Above The Crescent*, 62.

traditional view of scripture, in turn challenging the need for mission. Zwemer hoped to see Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches united in their missionary efforts among Muslims. Such a move is significant since no delegates were invited from the Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic missionary agencies to the Edinburgh conference. Zwemer's vision of Christian ecumenism would never materialise in his lifetime except for the ecumenical spirit reflected in the journal he founded, namely *Moslem World*. Moreover, Zwemer was very much encouraged by the formation of the World Council of Churches and he was at the forefront of the agenda of mission among Muslims.

Since Zwemer's time, we have encountered a dramatic shift in Islamic studies. The commonly accepted view of the role of Muhammad in the compilation of the Quran has been brought into doubt.³⁵² The two decades after Zwemer's death saw such critical work as *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (1977) by John Wansborough and *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (1977) by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook which puts into question the much accepted Muslim narrative of the emergence of Islam. Such critical work was not received well by Muslims but, rather, it have been banned in Muslim countries and, at times, death treat were issued to the authors.³⁵³ Moreover, research on Muhammad 'feels constrained to accept the pious Muslim version of the prophet's life.'³⁵⁴ It is worth noting that, Muslims may be forced to address the question raised by critical work on the prophet of Islam and its book, in the same manner Christians have had to deal with the biblical criticism that began in the 17th century and continues to the present day.

Zwemer's encounter with the Muslim World to some degree shaped his perception of Islam. He believed Islamic scripture and Muhammad had a regressive influence on the Islamic world. Likewise, he perceived that a move away from the Quran and the *sunna* of Muhammad would result in the advancement of the Muslim world. It was commonly believed that Western advancement was due to the influence of Christianity and Zwemer

³⁵² P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World* (1977).

³⁵³ Bennett, *Studying Islam: The Critical Issues*, 28.

³⁵⁴ Pipes, *Militant Islam reaches America*, xvii.

hoped that the Muslim World would follow suit. This is for the reason that Islam was a stumbling block for the progression of Muslims. Zwemer found proponents of 'new Islam' to have superseded the example set by Muhammad. Since being a Muslim entails following the example of Muhammad, he found it puzzling as to why they would hold on to the Muslim label while having superseded the founder of their religion.

More importantly, Zwemer perceived that the Quran was not limited to hindering the Muslim world from advancing economically but also to playing a pivotal role in distracting Muslims from the truth of the Gospel. Zwemer hoped that progressive Muslims would move away from Islam and turn to the teaching of the New Testament. He viewed the radical Muslim reformers' return to the sources of the religion as part of the problem, since advancement did not lead advocates of 'new Islam' towards the Quran but rather away from it. His personal encounter with the Muslim world and the superstitious status given to the Quran would be something that simply troubled Zwemer. He was encouraged by Khan's effort of seeing an advanced Muslim world, by moving away from the source of the religion. He viewed Khan's commentary on the Bible the long overdue blueprint for Muslims to take the scripture seriously. He believed such a moment was the turning point in Christian mission to Muslims. Zwemer was in a unique position, unlike his predecessors Henry Martyn and Karl Pfander who did not encounter Muslims willing to engage with the Christian scripture. Hence, they committed a significant part of their apologetical writing defending the Old and New Testament from the Islamic claim of its corruption. Yet, in depicting such development, Zwemer was not overly optimistic with mission to the proponents of 'new Islam'. This is because he discovered that their outlook of the Christian message was identical to that of the traditionalist.

Zwemer expected there to be a clear inconsistency with the message of Muhammad as shown in Mecca and Medina. He believed, Muhammad deteriorated after the *Hijra*, as violence played a major part in his life, and it is through violence that such religion advanced as opposed to divine intervention. Moreover, Zwemer would negatively perceive a political interpretation of Muhammad's mission. Since the evangelical outlook

of the establishment of the Kingdom of God through the *kerygma* would have, in turn, influenced Zwemer's negative interpretation of Muhammad's campaign of establishing the theocratic rule after the *Hijra*. That is to say, from a Reformed position Zwemer would have equated the Kingdom of God as being a spiritual rule of God (John 18:36), brought to its fulfilment in an eschatological age, as opposed to the establishment of a kingdom defined as the earthly territory. This would have been contrary to the Islamic concept of the establishment of the earthly kingdom of the divine through the implementation of *sharia Law* as taught by Muhammad; this would turn *daru ul-harb* ('the Land of warfare') into *daru ul-Islam* ('Land of Islam').

Zwemer viewed Abdul Wahhab's effort of reforming Islam by returning to Muhammad and the Quran to be regressive in nature. Moreover, the movement named after him – Wahhabism – Zwemer viewed as a destructive influence on the Islamic world. That is, giving the Quran and Muhammad an important position in Islam did not equate advancement. To the contrary, Zwemer objected to a radical Muslim return to the source of the religion and he used Abd al Wahhab as an example. Since such a return implied application of the death penalty for apostasy (Q. 2:217, 4:89) this will go against Zwemer's vision for evangelism among Muslims as a fulfilment of the great commission (Matthew 28:19). Therefore, Zwemer viewed radical Muslim reformers as a hindrance to missionary work among Muslims.

We have seen that Zwemer's view of Islam was in general similar to his contemporary missionaries. However, contrary to the *status quo* Zwemer warned that the only route Muslims would follow is not limited to a progressive route but rather a radical one. On the one hand, at the heart of Christian mission to Muslims lies the conversion to Christianity. On the other hand, radical Muslims aimed to implement the death penalty for those who leave Islam. Hence, he warned the church of such a perpetual danger. As a result, Zwemer found missionary work in the Muslim world a difficult undertaking. He viewed the main cause for such challenge to be Islamic law, which sanctioned the death sentence to Muslim converts. Zwemer came across such problems earlier in his work in Arabia. He observed Kamil Abdul Masih a convert from Islam killed by poisoning.

Zwemer's assessment is not limited to his time, but it is applicable to the present context. The law of apostasy has been one of the greatest challenges Christian mission is facing in the Muslim world.³⁵⁵ This partly explains Zwemer's emphasis on the need for the advocates of 'new Islam' to push the progressive agenda in the Muslim world, where religious freedom is guaranteed for converts. Muslims should be encouraged to abolish such barbaric and inhuman law. In turn, freedom to change religion should be adopted in Muslims lands in accordance with the UN human right convention article 18. Hence, Zwemer's effort of having individual converts would have a broader consequence. Time has proved Zwemer to be correct in this evaluation, since fundamental Islam has become a challenge not limited to Christian mission only. We should add that, other factors could have played a part in a low rate of the Muslim conversion to Christianity. For Muslims following Christianity will be akin to equate taking on the identity of the colonising powers.

Zwemer was correct in observing that the Quran is misleading since it supports the Christian scripture in theory but not in practice. Despite the claim that the Quran is a continuation of previous revelations, it is false in presenting sound biblical teachings. Zwemer finds its origin in pagan, Jewish and Christian sources brought together in a Muhammad-centric fashion. For Zwemer Muhammad was simply making claims about bringing a law from God. He saw Muhammad himself as the origin of this law, and his sinful desires as a pretext for a claiming a divine edict. Zwemer's missionary strategy was that Muslims would examine both scriptures and come to a sober conclusion, as opposed to reading the Christian scripture through the Quranic Lens. Similar to Martin Luther's push for the wider readership of the Quran, Zwemer encouraged the availability of Quran in the languages native to Muslims. Believing that such an undertaking will show Muslims the bankrupt nature of their text vis-à-vis the Christian scripture.

Zwemer's narrative of Islam should be viewed critically since he approached it from a missionary perspective. We find Zwemer praising Islamic theology when in agreement

³⁵⁵ See Paul Marshall *Silence: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide* (2011).

with Christianity and downplaying or rejecting it when it goes contrary to his belief. Zwemer's missionary endeavours could, in turn, be interpreted as an American imperial effort to change the faith and culture of Muslims. Since then Muslims have not accepted Zwemer's push for the separation of religion and faith, given that Islam in its essence brings the two together. Zwemer would not support an idea of holding on to what is 'good' in Islam, as opposed to a critical approach to its prophet and Scripture. The question still stands whether Zwemer's approach to Islam was productive in missionary and ecumenical engagement. Some would view Zwemer's attitude towards Islam to be counterproductive.³⁵⁶

Zwemer was not limited to labelling Muhammad a false prophet, but rather would see him as one that has taken the place of Christ; Muhammad not as a messenger from God but rather one that takes away Muslims from the truth. Zwemer found the Quranic claim of continuation with previous revelation puzzling; he believed that Muslims should engage with the Christian scripture as opposed to through the lenses of the Quran. Zwemer does not accept that Muhammad was a prophet from God nor the Quran as the word of God. Interestingly, Zwemer's appreciation of the style of the Quran in the early part of his life was superficial in nature since it was nothing short of repetition of Hughes work. Rather, his in-depth study of the Islamic text subsequently led him to abandon these views.

It is no coincidence that such an approach is present in Zwemer's perception of Muhammad and the Quran since a confrontational approach was an important part of the evangelical missionary strategy towards Islam in the 19th century. We can deduce that what is perceived to be foundational in Islam is, seen as a hindrance for the Christian mission. Moreover, Jesus is a point of commonality between Christians and Muslims as he is mentioned in both scriptures. In turn, Christians have used such likeness as the foundation in undertaking missionary work among Muslims. However, Zwemer differentiated the Jesus of the New Testament from Isa of the Quran. He believed the

³⁵⁶ Brown, *The Way of the Prophet*, 90.

Quran distorts the Christ found in the Christian scripture. He hoped that Jesus would replace Muhammad in the heart of Muslims and, in turn, bring spiritual and social transformation to the Muslim world. Zwemer's approach to Islam could be more common with missionaries who work among observant as opposed to nominal Muslims. Since observant Muslims have greater knowledge of their faith, they may be more critical to the Christian message. Moreover, in view of numerous polemical literature directed against the Christian message, Zwemer's work will be of considerable interest for those willing to question the fundamentals of the Islamic faith.

Nevertheless, Zwemer highlighted the missiological benefit of the Quranic exaltation of the Christian scripture despite the belief that the scriptures have been corrupted. In his missionary work among Muslims, he would use language familiar to the listeners by using the Quranic names and terminologies. However, we do not find Zwemer using the prophet of Islam in his missionary strategy toward Islam. Perhaps he believed that there was no place for Muhammad in the preaching of the Christian message. Zwemer examined Muhammad through the Christian scripture, the law of the time and the law as brought by Muhammad himself, and Zwemer found Muhammad wanting.

His attitude towards Muhammad, the Quran and the Islamic reformers is not easy to ascertain because it consists of relatively brief comments in some of his work. Nevertheless, from all the scattered comments, it is possible to construct the following picture of Zwemer's attitude towards Islam. Zwemer writes on Islam, from a Christian perspective for a missionary purpose, and not necessarily designed to cover new ground in Islamic scholarship. He aimed to present 'the real character of Mohammad and the real doctrine and moral value of Islam'.³⁵⁷ He believed Islam was the reason for the backward status of the Muslim world and inferior ideology to Christianity. In Addition, Zwemer held an exclusivist view and treated Islam as human not divine in origin.

In addition, He believed Islam spread by the sword and its followers are acquired and kept through violence. He did not consider Islam to be preparation for salvation or to

³⁵⁷ Zwemer, *Moslem World*, xi.

have a role in the divine plan of salvation, but an obstacle in its distortion of Christian doctrine. However, he would not present Islam as a religion influenced by Satan. Zwemer wrote *Disintegration of Islam* (1916) believing Islam was in the phase of dying, when most of the Muslim world was under British rule. It was more feasible to do mission work under the British imperial rule than under the Islamic law. However, Zwemer was clearly wrong in his evaluation that Islam was declining. To the contrary there has been many revival Islamic movements and resurgence within Islam.

We shall conclude by highlighting that we can learn immensely in the present age from Zwemer missionary strategy towards Islam. On one hand, his work could help Christians build on his legacy and insight. On the other hand, Muslims could engage with his interpretation of their faith by investigating its merit and seeing whether his vision of an advanced and forward-looking Muslim World is of relevance.

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