

**THE QURANIC BASES OF DIALOGUE
BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY
ON THE CONCEPT OF GOD**

By : Ismail Hamid (M.A.)

THE PROBLEM

Monotheism derives from the combination of mono and theos; mono means one and theos means God. In religion monotheism means the belief that God is one, or that there is only one God.

To believe in One God means in general to abandon often with contempt or aversion, many older beliefs, hopes, fears and customs relating to many gods.¹

Thus the opponent of monotheism as a belief in One God in the history of religion appears to be polytheism or a belief in many gods.

In religion it has been classified Judaism, Christianity and Islam as being the religions which profess monotheism, the belief in One God. Since my paper deals with the comparative study between Islam and Christianity, I would like only to question the validity of placing Christianity under the category of the religion of monotheism, while other religions either have been characterized as polytheism or pantheism.

It seems that monotheism in the religious studies has extended its scope of meaning beyond the concept of One God as the literal meaning of the word that could be understood. Thus monotheism can be interpreted into different purposes. Christianity believes in trinity and at the same time, they believe in unity of God. The concept of One God in Christianity is contained of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To make it simple, the concept of Divine Being in Christianity is both plurality and unity. It appears that the concept of Divine Being in Christianity has close similarity to some primitive religions which believe in plurality of gods or various spirits or hidden powers, and at the same time they believe in the Supreme Being. The pre-Islamic Arabs as referred by the Qur'an believed in various idols and spirits, but when they were in distress they would turn to Allah, the Supreme Being, asking for help.² In other words, some primitive religions can be defined as the religion of plurality and unity of God. Therefore if monotheism can accept Christianity to

¹ James Hasting (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 8 (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1916), p. 817.

² H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), p.33.

be defined under this term, there is no reason not to include other primitive religions under the same category. On the contrary, primitive religions have often been branded as the religions of polytheism.

Islam believes in One God. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of the belief in One Being and totally denies the concept of plurality of God. The Qur'an rejects the religion of the pre-Islamic Arab who believed in the plurality of God, though they had the concept of Supreme Being. The same way the Qur'an rejects the concept of the trinity in Christianity, and denies the elevation of Jesus as Son of God, but considers him as merely a human being like Muhammad. From the Qur'anic point of view the concept of God in Christianity is polytheism. Since the concept of God in Islam is different from Christianity, a question can be raised whether Christianity should be placed under the meaning of monotheism or not. If the term of monotheism can be applied to the meaning of God in Christianity, then Islam has to be classified under a different term which can meet its real meaning.

THE UNITY OF GOD

The concept of God in Christianity today is expressed in the form of the Holy Trinity.

Jesus Christ is the second person, the Son, incarnate: begotten, consubstantial with the Father. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity is the Spirit of Love, proceeds from Father and Son.

Thus God in Christianity is One but at the same time God is consisted of Three Persons.³

The Qur'an recognizes Christianity as well as Judaism were the religions of revelation which based their concept of Divine Being on monotheism, the religion of One God. The Qur'an claims that Christianity originally believed in One God and Jesus as merely the prophet of God. He is neither incarnate nor God's Son, but he is a man. The Qur'an says,

Jesus said: 'O the people of Israel worship God my Lord and your Lord.' (V:75)⁴

It seems that some Christian scholars themselves indicate the existence of monotheism, the belief in One God, in Christianity as suggested by the Qur'an. Among them J.S. Whale, who says

³ George Brantl, *Catholicism* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p. 68.

⁴ Ahmad Shalaby, *Muqaranah al'Adyan, al-Masihiyah* (Cairo. Maktabah al Nahdah, 1973), p. 53.

The first was monotheism, the deep religious conviction that there is but one God, holy and transcendent, and that to worship anything else is idolatry. To Israel, and to the New Israel of the Christian Church, idolatry in all its forms was sin at its worse, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. VI:4). 'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me' (Isa XIV:5).⁵

According to J.S. Whale St. Paul was the first Christian scholar who built up a philosophy with Jesus Christ as its centre. Then it followed the concept of incarnation. God is the Father and Jesus is His son.⁶

The Qur'an contends that Jesus is man and not the son of God. He is the son of Mary as well as the prophet of God,

They do blaspheme who say: 'God is Christ the son of Mary whoever joins other gods with God, God will forbid him the garden, and the fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong doers, be no one to help. (5:75).⁷

According to the Qur'an Jesus is not divine. He is merely a prophet whom God appointed to reform the people of Israel. He did not introduce a new law, though he brought a revelation from God.

God taught Jesus the scripture and wisdom, the Torah, and the Evangel and sent him a prophet to the children of Israel (3:48).⁸

The Qur'an also stresses that Jesus Christ was a servant of God. *He was no more than a servant. We grant our favour to him, and We made him an example to the children of Israel. (43:59).⁹*

The Qur'an comments further on the nature of Jesus, *O people of the book commit no excesses in your religion nor say of God naught but the truth. Christ, the son of Mary, was (no more than) an apostle of God and His word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: For God is One God: Glory be to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs. (4:171).¹⁰*

⁵ J.S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-'Arabiyyah, 1968), p. 266.

⁸ P.T. Raju, *The Great Asian Religion, Islam*, article by I.R. al Faruqi (N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 325.

⁹ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 13336

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 233, 234.

The above verse of the Qur'an establishes the right relationship of Jesus to God rejecting the belief of the Christians who exalted him to the rank of the Son of God. In the above Qur'anic verse which says that God bestowed His word on Mary cannot be equated with the Christian conception of Jesus as the word of God. Al Alusi interprets "His word" as being equivalent to one who guides men just as the Word of God is a guidance for mankind. Another meaning given by al Alusi is that "word" here means the good news communicated to Mary by the angels that she would give birth to a child.¹¹ According to al Razi "word" here means command of God, because Jesus was born by God's command without having conceived him in a normal process as other women used to do, just as the creation of Adam took place by the command of God.¹²

As regards the word "Ruh" as mentioned by the Qur'an al Jubba'i says that Jesus has been called "Ruh" (soul or spirit), because men are quickened to life caused by him, just as they receive life by the soul or the spirit.¹³ Al Alusi explains that "Ruh" means "Rahman" which has wider meaning than mercy, it includes the idea of grace, compassion and fatherly protection. Al Alusi refers to a Qur'anic verse

Thou will not find a people who believe in Allah and the latter day loving those who oppose Allah and His messenger, even though they be their fathers or their sons or their kinfolk. These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and strengthened them with a spirit from" (58:22).

This verse of the Qur'an speaks about God as having strengthened the heart of sincere Muslims with a spirit from Himself. Therefore, Jesus was also the Spirit of God in the same sense, because God supported him in the struggle against evil and unrighteousness.¹⁴

Al Razi explains that the word "Ruh" used for Jesus is meant to indicate purity and cleanliness, because Jesus came into the world without Mary having any conjugal relation with a male. Therefore, the word "Ruh" used to show that God has exalted to a high status. Secondly, Jesus came and brought a new life to a spiritually decadent people.¹⁵ In addition to the above explanation of the word "Ruh," the Qur'an does not intend to exalt Jesus above the status of human being, because the Qur'an also mentions the same reference when it makes the statement about Adam.

¹¹ Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *The Qur'anic Concept of History* (Karachi: Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), p. 182.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁴ Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

I have him complete and breathed into him My Spirit. (15:29).¹⁶

From the above discussion it shows the Qur'an means to uphold the position of Jesus as the great prophet of God. Having used the expression like "word" and "spirit" it does not mean to be understood like the Christian interpretation of Jesus as Divine Being. Instead, he is just an ordinary man. The Qur'an makes clear that it rejects the concept of trinity and elevation of Jesus to the status of the Son of God.¹⁷ Some Christian scholars try to interpret the Qur'anic reference to the Word of God and Spirit in favour of their understanding on the concept of Jesus as Divine; such as the interpretation made by Jacques Jomier. In his discussion of the verses of the Qur'an in (4:169-170/171-172) which the Qur'an mentions "His word" in reference to the birth of Jesus Christ, Jacques Jomier says,

This appeal is addressed to Christians. The text might possibly be understood in a Christian sense, if one would scrutinize the interpretation of some terms. We have here two great titles of Jesus: Messiah, Word of God.¹⁸

But in the following statements, he seems to agree that the Qur'an mentions *Do not say Three*, with particular reference to the concept of trinity, which the Qur'an rejects. Therefore, there is no reason to argue in favour of the Divinity of Jesus from the standpoint of the Qur'an. The Qur'an totally rejects the attribute of Divinity to be given to anyone except to Allah alone.

In commenting on the place of Jesus in the Qur'an Jacques Jomier further says

The Qur'an presents the person of Christ under a two-fold aspect. On the one hand, the Qur'an speaks of Jesus with great respect; several statements suggest His holiness very clearly. But on the other, the Qur'an mentions He is just a mere creature.¹⁹

In other words, Jacques Jomier tries to say that the Qur'an gives two pictures of Jesus Christ, one as Divine and the other as purely a man. In answer to this interpretation or similar comments, the Qur'an says very clearly

O People of the Book! Do not go to extreme in your religion and never say anything on behalf of God except the truth. Jesus, the Messiah, the son of Mary, is only a prophet of God. (4:171).

In reference to the Christian's exaltation of Jesus to the position of the Divine, the Qur'an says,

¹⁶ Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185.

¹⁸ Jacques Jomier, *The Bible and The Qur'an* (New York: Desclee Co., 1964), p. 85.

¹⁹ Jacques Jomier, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ, the son of Mary. Say: 'Who then hath the least power against God, if His Will were to destroy Christ, the son of Mary, his mother and all — everyone that is on the earth? For to God belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between. He createth what he pleaseth. For God hath power over all things' (5:19).²⁰

The Qur'an also charges that some Christians do not only exalt Jesus as Divine, but they elevate Mary to the position of Divine. The Qur'an says on this,

And behold: God will say: 'O Jesus, the son of Mary didst thou say unto men, 'worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?' He will say, 'Glory to thee never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden' (5:119).²¹

The above statement of the Qur'an referred to some Christian such as Mariolatory of the Roman Church which considers Mary as Divine. Here the Qur'an does not refer to Mary as one of the gods of the Christian trinity.²² The Qur'an denies such a holy position imposed upon both of Mary and her son. The Qur'an says,

They both used to eat food (5:75)

Here the Qur'an says that both of them are mortal; they required food to sustain themselves. The Qur'an stresses that the one is born by a mortal mother must be himself created and mortal, and they always stood in need of something other than themselves, that is food. While God needs nothing outside Himself because He is self-sustaining.²³

Kenneth Cragg, one of the Christian scholars, tries to justify the concept of Trinity in Christianity by saying,

We insist that doctrines of God are not properly to be evaluated by the criterion of simplicity. The Trinity is a way of understanding God's unity. For the Muslim, faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit does violence to the Divine Unity. For the Christian, it expresses and illuminates that unity. The Muslim sees the doctrine of the Trinity as incompatible with belief in the unity of God. The Christian finds these not merely compatible, but interdependent. The issue Christianity understands is not

²⁰ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, pp. 246, 247.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

²² Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

²³ Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

*Trinity and Unity, but Trinity and atheism We are not discussing monotheism and polytheism. Muslims who debate polytheism are not discussing Christianity. Where we differ is how to define and understand the Unity. What lies outside that issue is irrelevant to Christianity.*²⁴

From the above statement Kenneth Cragg tries to define trinity as unity. From the Qur'anic point of view which is based on man's logical thinking, three cannot be one. The Qur'an says,

Believe in God and His messengers and do not say three desist. It is better for you. God is only one. Far be it from Him that He should have a son (4:171).

Kenneth Cragg seems to insist that trinity must be in the area of One God rather than polytheism. But from the Qur'anic point of view, whenever a belief tries to create more than One God, it is polytheism, because polytheism means plurality of gods. Kenneth Cragg seems to call for the division between theism and atheism, instead of dividing unity and polytheism. But the Qur'an wants to make it very clear to the readers that trinity is not unity. The Qur'an follows the rational thinking when it says "do not hold the trinitarian view."

In debating with the Christians, the Qur'an calls them,
O people of the Book! Come now to a fair word common to both of us, that we shall never associate aught with Him, and that we shall not take one another for Lord beside God. But if they turn away, then say: 'Remember, we do submit to God (3:64).

The Qur'an again says,
*Say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to you (O, People of the Book), and our God and your God is One; it is to Him that we submit (29:47).*²⁵

The Qur'an says that the concept of God in Christianity is corrupted and that this concept has been influenced by pagan faith and tradition. Therefore, the concept of unity of God deviated into trinity. The Qur'an says,

And the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. These are the words of theirs; they imitate the saying of the pagans preceding them and they were enjoined that they should serve One God only; there is no deity except He; far be from His Glory what they set up (19:30-31).

On the other place the Qur'an again stresses on the pagan influence in Christianity by saying

²⁴ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 307, 308.

²⁵ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, pp. 325, 326.

Say (O Muhammad): 'O people of the book stress not in your religion other than the truth and follow not the low desires of the people (the pagans) who erred of old and led many astray and fell away from the right path (9:77).

HIS JUDGEMENT

Christianity believes in the doctrine of original sin. It presupposes that man is by nature a sinful creature in the eyes of God. The sin committed by Adam is falling upon all his children. In order to save men from their sins, the son of God appeared in the form of a human being to die on the cross and atone for the sins committed by men. No man can be saved in front of God's judgement, unless he believes in Christ.

The Qur'an contradicts Christianity on the concept of original sin. The Qur'an mentions that Adam and Eve had committed sin in the garden of paradise, but they were forgiven by God. Therefore the Qur'an indicates that Adam was no longer sinful, neither were his children who came generations after him. The Qur'an says,

*We told Adam and his spouse to live in paradise, to eat happily of its fruits, except that tree which makes them unrighteous. Satan caused them to slip and drove them out of their state. We said, 'Go forth, some of your enemies of others, and inhabit the earth for a limited time.' Adam then received a revelation in words from his Lord. He repented and was forgiven. God always listens to repentant voice (2:34-37)*²⁶

From the above verse, the Qur'an contends that men are innocent and pure from sin at their birth. Sin is acquired by men; it is not inherited from Adam as the Christians believe. Contrary to the Christian doctrine, Islam stresses that sin and virtue begin when men reach a certain age, when they know how to make use of their own intellect which can distinguish between right and wrong.

In contrast to Islam, the teaching of Christianity differs from the views expressed by the Qur'an. According to Christianity, Adam and Eve after they had sinned to God in the paradise, lost sanctifying grace, the right of Heaven and their special gifts, they became subject to death, to suffering and to strong inclination to evil and they were driven from the garden of paradise. On the account of Adam's sin his descendents came to the world continuing to carry with them the inherited sin which is called original sin.²⁷ This sin descends

²⁶ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, pp. 347, 348.

²⁷ John A. O'Brien, *Understanding the Catholic Faith* (Indiana: Maria Press, 1954), pp. 65-67.

from Adam and falls upon every one of us, whether one commits wrongdoing or not.

The judgement of God, according to the Qur'an, is dependent upon man's own determination. Man is innocent and pure from sin at his birth; he can choose by his own decision either to maintain his own purity from sin or commit sin. In other words, in Islam God does not pronounce any man to be sinful, until he commits a wrongdoing which is forbidden by God. The Qur'an says,

God commits no injustice to anyone. It is to themselves that men are unjust. Say, 'O men, the truth has come to your Lord. Whoever accepts this guidance does so to his own merit and whoever errs does so to his own demerit Teach the Qur'an, that man may learn that it is by his own deeds that he delivers himself to ruin. Whatever man has earned, he will certainly be given (10:44, 6:70; 53:40).²⁸

The above verse, the Qur'an indicates that it does not accept the doctrine of atonement. In Christianity the doctrine of atonement holds that Jesus Christ was the only innocent soul. He was crucified for the purpose of saving humanity from their sins. But the Qur'an suggests that man's own efforts decide his own destiny.

Christianity considers man is basically corrupt. But Islam only indicates that man has been characterized with weakness. He is tempted to do evil, but he can remain virtuous and innocent person. The Qur'an describes

man was created impatient, he panics at the fall of evil and proudly withdraws unto himself at the fall of good, except those who steadfastly pray, who recognize the right of the destitute and deprived, who believe in the Day of Judgement who maintain chastity remain true to their trust and covenant and fulfill their testimony (70:19-33).²⁹

The Qur'an tells us that man is innocent at his birth, but when he grows up he tends to be characterized with certain weakness; therefore, the Qur'an keeps on reminding men of their weaknesses, injustices and ingratitude. The Qur'an uses the following attributes whenever it describes men.

"Man is created weak," "surely man is unjust and ungrateful," "man is hasty," "man is covetous" and "verily, man is created extremely impatient."³⁰

²⁸P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

²⁹P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

³⁰Ahmad A. Galwash, *The Religion of Islam* (New York: Hafner Pub. Co., undated), p. 174.

The above description of men in the Qur'an is simply to remind men of their weaknesses, and they must be well prepared to overcome all these weaknesses. Therefore, men must turn to their God for assistance and guidance. In spite of the fact that men are accompanied with weaknesses, they are not at all to be implied as sin, unless and until they commit wrongdoings.

Islam considers that the most virtuous man comes out successfully from all temptations which one encounters. For Islam the life in the world is a test which determines the form of life he is going to live in the hereafter. Anyone who follows God's instructions, in doing good deeds, he will be awarded with salvation. Those who choose to disobey God and commit evil, they are guilty of disobedience, and will be punished by God.³¹ The Qur'an refers to this by saying,

Those who believe and rely on their Lord are those who forgive the trespasses of others even in anger and resist victoriously the temptation of evil (42:36, 37).³²

In Islam God's judgement is also based on the nature of the person who commits evil, if a person die in infancy, regardless of the faith of his parents, he will be saved. If a child commits a wrongdoing, he will not be considered as a sinner and he will not be punished by God. A man will not be responsible for a deed that he commits during his unconsciousness of sleep or insanity. Islam considers a child, an unconscious person or insane are not responsible for what they have done; therefore, they will not receive any punishment from God in the day of judgement. According to Islam in order to be responsible for any action, one must possess his full mental faculties.³³

The above teaching of Islam is contrary to Christianity which puts emphasis on Baptism of a child, because Baptism gives men's soul the new life of sanctifying grace by which men become children of God and heir of heaven. In contrast to Islam, Christianity teaches that Baptism can take men's sin, because Christ has said,

Unless a man be born again of water and the spirit of Me, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.³⁴

Therefore, Christianity teaches that children must be baptized as soon as possible after birth because baptism is necessary for one's salvation. Infants who dies without baptism do not suffer the punish-

³¹Maryam Jameelah, *Islam Versus Ahl al Kitab Past and Present* (Lahore: Mohd Yusuf Khan, 1968), pp. 210, 211.

³²P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

³³Maryam Jameelah, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

³⁴John A. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-199.

ment of those who die in mortal sin, but they cannot enjoy the supernatural happiness of Heaven.³⁵

In Christianity, forgiveness from God is not possible, unless through the doctrine of grace. Grace is manifested and communicated through the historical person of Jesus Christ. Man cannot assume that he can earn forgiveness from God, unless help comes to him from outside; otherwise "he is doomed to despair."³⁶ For this reason Christianity always emphasized the faith in Jesus Christ, because Jesus is only begotten son and the Redeemer of the sins of all mankind.

The Qur'an does not certainly agree with the above Christian doctrine. On the contrary, the Qur'an teaches that each person is possible to obtain forgiveness from God directly, without any intermediary such as in Christianity. The door of forgiveness in Islam is always open as long as one does his best to overcome evil temptation and begs God for forgiveness from the bottom of his heart, and God certainly will grant his prayer, especially when one's sin has been committed out of his ignorance.

God in Islam as described by the Qur'an is Rahman (Most Merciful), Tawwab (Most Pardoning), 'Afu (one who effaces faults) and Ghaffar (Most Forgiving). The plea for forgiveness is directly obtained from God, no grace is necessary for the acceptance of the plea of a sinner. The Qur'an says,

Verily God pardoneth not that partner should be ascribed to Him, while He pardoneth all the else to whom He will (4:110).

In another verse the Qur'an describes how God is willing to forgive all the sins committed by men without any grace. The Qur'an says,

O my slaves who have been prodigal to your own hurt, despair not of the mercy of God. Verily He is forgiveth all sins, verily He is the forgiving, the Merciful. (39:59).³⁷

God in Islam as described by the Qur'an both Merciful and Just; Mercy because He always is ready to forgive a person who asks for it in sincerity, without any requirement of grace such as in Christianity. God is Just because He punishes anyone according to the degree of one's crime. The Qur'an clearly defines the conditions of God's judgement in Islam.

God will not burden any soul beyond its power, it shall enjoy the good which it has acquired, and shall bear the evil, for the acquirement of which it laboured. Our Lord, punish us not if we

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 194-199.

³⁶Marvin Halverson and Arthur A. Cohen, *Handbook of Christian Theology* (New York: The World Pub. Co., 1958), pp. 137, 138.

³⁷Ahmad A. Galwash, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

*forget, or fall into sin; Our Lord, lay not on us a burden, like that which Thou hast laid on those who have been before us; neither make us, O Lord, to bear what we have not the strength to bear; but blot out our sins, and forgive us, and have pity on us. Thou art our Patron; help us; therefore, against those who do not believe (2:286).*³⁸

From the above statements made by the Qur'an, it also indicates that God's judgement which decides one's salvation is based on his own good deeds. The Qur'an stresses that one shall enjoy the good which he has acquired. The Qur'an describes the judgement of God in Islam according to one's own action. If one performs good deeds, he will be awarded good reward, if one does evil, he will be punished. The Qur'an refers to this by saying,

*that man can have nothing but what he strives for. That (the fruit of) his striving will soon come in sight. Then will he be rewarded with a reward in sight (53:39-41).*³⁹

On the other hand, the meaning of salvation in Christianity is different from the standpoint of the Qur'an. Salvation in Christianity "is something done in for and for man by the will and work of God".⁴⁰

and this process must be carried out through Jesus Christ. The process of salvation in Christianity has to go through the Divine's will. Christianity accepts only the effort of man to choose his life to be founded upon openness to God. Through this process, then, one can obtain salvation. Such openness is also described in terms of faith and trust.⁴¹

From the Qur'anic point of view that faith is not the only condition for the judgement and salvation; it must follow by one's good deeds. Therefore the Qur'an always reminds the readers repeatedly "O the people who believe and do good deed." It seems the Qur'an wants to insist that the criterion of the faith must be manifested in good deed. The Qur'an always assures those who have faith and do good deed will be well rewarded without any grace, because the judgement of God in Islam is based on one's own merit and demerit. But Christianity always put emphasis that salvation can only take place through Jesus Christ. However, the Qur'an totally rejects this stand by saying,

*Namely, that no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another (53:38).*⁴²

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁹ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 1449.

⁴⁰ M. Halverson and A.A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 336, 337.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁴² A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 1449.

From the same stand, Islam does not agree the role of priest as intermediary. In Islam every soul must labour for his own destiny. Islam rejects the teaching of the Holy Spirit descends in the greatest degree to the elected popes, and in lesser degrees to bishops, deans and clergy.⁴³

Islam also disagrees to monasticism, apostolic succession whose livelihood depends upon the claim that after their ordination as priest, they have the Spirit of God in them and act as the intercessor between the people and Jesus. But the Qur'an asks men to pray directly to God for God promises to answer men's prayers: Therefore, the Qur'an prefers the relationship of men and their God as a direct relationship, no intermediary is allowed. The Qur'an criticizes Christianity because the role of the priests play such the intermediary.

We do not enjoin them to become monks. That was their invention (57:27),

and in another verse, the Qur'an refers again

They have taken their priests and monks for gods "
(9:30).⁴⁴

The Qur'an lays down the basis of justice in the judgement must be on the nature of each one performance, good or evil.

Who receiveth guidance receiveth it for his own benefit. Who goeth astray doth so to his own loss. No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another: nor would we visit our wrath until we had sent an apostle (to give warning) (17:15).⁴⁵

Therefore God in Islam will judge on the merit of one's performance, rather than grace or external influence upon him.

HIS CREATION

The Qur'an mentions that God does not create the world without any purpose. The Qur'an refers to this.

We have not created the Heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in sport: We have not created them for a serious end, but the greater part of them understood not (XLV: 38, 39).

The above statements of the Qur'an indicates that God has created all things in the world not in vain. Every existence is full of meaning, a definite and well-planned Divine scheme.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ahmad A. Galwash, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁴⁴ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

⁴⁵ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 698.

⁴⁶ F.R. Ansari, *Islam and Christianity in the Modern World* (Karachi: Federation of Islamic Mission, 1965), p. 201.

According to Christianity the creative process in nature is the imaging of God, and man, too, is the image of God. The calling of man is to restore all things to God and to bring forth the imagery of divine perfection in nature and the human community which is "the highest image of the inner life of God."⁴⁷ According to the Qur'an man is also created from God's spirit. The Qur'an refers to this.

We have created man out of a substance of clay Blessed is God, the best creator who well-formed man and breathed into him of His own Spirit. (23:12-14).⁴⁸

However, the role of man defined by the Qur'an as the vicegerent of God on the earth. The Qur'an says,

I shall create a vicegerent for Myself on earth. (2:30).

In another place the Qur'an says,

We have offered our trust to heaven and earth and mountain, but they feared and withdrew from undertaking it. Man, however, came forward and assumed it" (33:72), and "It is God who established you as His vicegerents on earth" (6:116).⁴⁹

Christianity describes about the creation of man beginning with the sin of Adam, who introduced misery and anxiety into the history of man. Turned from God in sin, man experiences agony. He becomes a slave of his own self and longing for freedom which he himself cannot give. Therefore, man is described by Christianity always in misery.⁵⁰ The Qur'an describes that man is created by God as free and responsible creature. The Qur'an says,

God does not change the situation of any group of men until they transform their own selves (13:11).⁵¹

According to Islam, men act as the vicegerents of God as well as His servants, they have to serve Him by establishing virtuous society on the earth. From the Islamic point of view, in order to serve God, men have to serve his fellow men, to do good deeds to his own kind and prevent evil among them, men are entitled to obtain reward from their Creator. Each man is responsible for the role he is assigned. The Qur'an reminds men,

Strive with might in God's course with your wealth and your life, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah. They are people who will achieve. (9:20).⁵²

⁴⁷ George Brantl, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁴⁸ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

⁴⁹ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

⁵⁰ George Brantl, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵¹ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

⁵² M. Pickthall, *Qur'anic Advices* (Karachi: Taj Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 11.

The Qur'an enjoins man as vicegerent of God to do good deeds as well as to prevent evil and vice on the earth. The Qur'an says

*There should be among you a party who should invite to goodness and enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil.*⁵³

In the facing of injustice and evil men have to fight by every means possible, never to retreat except for strategical purposes. The Qur'an rejects the passive stand of Christianity in facing evil and injustice, such as reported that Jesus had uttered, if one hits you on the right cheek, let him hit on the other. Contrary to this stand, the Qur'an commands men as the vicegerents of God to resist evil and injustice.

*Those who when great wrong is done to them, they defend themselves. The guardian of ill-deed is an ill the like thereof.*⁵⁴

God commands men as His creatures to establish virtuous society and cooperate among themselves in doing good deeds and fight against evil. If they fail to comply with God's order the Qur'an says they will be threatened to perish.

*Men are surely to perish, unless they believe, do good deed and enjoin one another to the right and to be patient in face of evil. (103:2-3).*⁵⁵

Men's attempt to perform his role as vicegerent of God on earth is already promised of reward and salvation by God regardless, whether his effort meet a success or failure. If man fails to carry out God's command, he has not felt grief, or despair, because the Qur'an says:

*Whoever submit his whole self to God and he is a doer of good, he will be rewarded by his God and he shall not fear nor grieve. (2:112).*⁵⁶

The purpose of the creation of men by God on the earth is to act as His vicegerent. They have to carry God's command of establishing good society on the earth. In Islam God is good, therefore, his creation and command are for the purpose of goodness and justness. All God's creatures in the world will enjoy justice and happiness as long as they comply with His command. Evil which is prevalent in the world is due to men's own errors and deviation from the straight path which is commanded by God.⁵⁷

⁵³ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

⁵⁴ M. Pickthall, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ P.T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

⁵⁶ A. Yusuf 'Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵⁷ Perkin, *A Study On Christianity* (K. Lumpur, undated), p.7.

CONCLUSION

The Qur'an has clearly differentiated between polytheism and Unity of God. From the Qur'anic point of view, trinity means plurality of Gods, and plurality is tantamount to polytheism. On this basis the concept of Divine Being cannot be defined under the same category or in the same definition such as monotheism.

There is alternatives for differentiating between the Islamic concept of Divine Being and the Christian understanding of the meaning of God. First, Christianity has to be taken out from the definition of monotheism and redefined under a new term such as Trinity, or Islam should be taken out of the definition of monotheism and redefined under the concept of unity of God.

The present concept of monotheism seems to be very wide in scope, so as to include religions which really have different understanding of the Divine Being. To do justice to scholarship, it is high time to look back on this term and classify different religions into their own proper settings. The present term of monotheism had been introduced and made popular by Christian scholars. A new look should be made to redefine the term without doing injustice to any particular religion. In my opinion, Islam and Judaism can be classified in the same category as far as the concept of God is concerned. Christianity is totally different from either Islam or Judaism. Christianity is unique for it claims unity and plurality at the same time. It has to have its own character distinct from the above religions. Hinduism should not be categorized as monotheism as some religious scholars have claimed. Hinduism clearly shows us that its concept of God is appropriate to be placed under monism or pantheism.