



A Review Of Similarities Between Robert Spencer's Polemical Views And The Primary Motives Of Orientalists

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Abstract

After carefully reading their writings, one feels inclined to admit that western orientalist have not been motivated by academic objectivity. Some orientalist, more particularly Arabists and Islamists, have made a well-orchestrated effort to denigrate Islam. This disparaging tendency was particularly pronounced during the heyday of colonial empires and it still exists. Robert Spencer's writings are a blatant manifestation of the orientalist agenda. He often regurgitates the biased ideas and notions presented by the prejudiced Orientalists. He questions the authenticity of Islamic sources and presents Islam as a violent religion which poses serious threat to the western values. This article investigates the similarities between Robert Spencer's prejudiced views and the primary motives of Orientalists

KEYWORDS: Colonization, Orient, European, Occident, Muhmmedanism, Middle Ages, Christians, Contraferentia.

In his critique of Islam, Robert Spencer falls back on a variety of tactics. Firstly, he endeavors to present the deeds and actions of an individual as an indispensable trait of the whole group. Secondly, he picks out the most extreme interpretations, expositions and opinions of Islam and asserts them to be the accurate, mainstream and normative position. Thirdly, he conflates cultural elements with religious practices, teachings and doctrines. Fourthly, he often regurgitates the biased ideas and notions presented by the prejudiced Orientalists. Finally, he weaponizes, revisits and occasionally forges history to buttress his arguments.

Robert Spencer views Islam as a chief rival to Catholicism and therefore considers his campaign as a crusade against Islam. He regards Islam as downright false, misleading and incomplete religion which is threat to the peace and wellbeing of the western world.

Robert Spencer persistently questions the historicity of Muhammad (peace be upon him). To substantiate his claim, he questions the authenticity of Islamic Sources. As he asserts: "A thorough review of the historical records provides startling indications that much, if not all, of what we know about Muhammad is legend, not historical fact."¹ With a view to making the holy Qur'an appear unreliable source of Muhammad's (peace be upon him) biography, he asserts: "A careful investigation similarly suggests that the Qur'an is not a collection of what Muhammad presented as revelations from the one true God..."²

He says: "from the vantage point of fourteen hundred years later it is virtually impossible to tell with certainty what is authentic in the mass of information and what isn't."³

Spencer believes that Muhammad (peace be upon him) waged jihad to satisfy his 'imperial ambitions'.⁴ According to Spencer, the Islamic apologists mention the examples of kindness and clemency of Muhammad (peace be upon him) but they "generally do not mention his exhortation to make war against unbelievers",⁵ and they do not mention his "his raids, his battles, his joy at the assassination of his enemies."⁶ Spencer maintains: "Muhammad's example is normative. We have seen how jihadist today invoke Badr and Khyber to exhort Muslims to fight according to the example of the Prophet. It is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain that Islam is a religion of peace when war and booty were the chief preoccupation of the Prophet of Islam."⁷ In brief, his ideas about Islam are very similar to the negative stereotypes created by orientalist scholars of Islam.

The concise compendium of the motives of Orientalism and the western ignorance of Islam can be aptly articulated in the words of a Swiss journalist and author Roger D. Pasquier. He asserts that the Christians or the dechristianized west has never really understood Islam. The Christians have constantly insulted Islam with a view to finding justification for initiating war against it. They have subjected it to ludicrously odd distortions the traces of which have not yet vanished from the western minds. Even today Islam means to many westerners just three ideas: polygamy, fatalism and fanaticism. Of course, there are some more educated and more cultivated people whose understanding of Islam is less distorted and they know that Islam signifies nothing more than "submission of God"

The ignorance of the western people is evident from the fact that most westerners think that Allah refers to the Divinity of Muslims; distinct from the God of Jews and Christians. They are astonished to hear that Allah refers to the same God in whom both Christians and Jews believe. They are unaware of the fact that even Arab Christians know God by the same name, Allah.

The western orientalists have studied Islam and they have produced extensive scholarly literature on various aspects of Islam. They have made considerable contribution in the philological and historical domains, but their philological and historical contribution has failed to better Christian understanding of Islam in any significant way.

One feels bound to concede that western orientalists have not been driven by scholarly impartiality. Some of the orientalists—more specifically Arabists and Islamists—have consciously endeavored to disparage Islam. This disparaging tendency was particularly prominent in the glorious phase of colonial empires and it still endures.

These are some of the basic reasons why Islam still continues to be maligned and misjudged by the west. Strangely enough, other Asiatic religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism have aroused greater interest as well as sympathy although Islam is ideologically and doctrinally closer Judaism and Christianity as they have originated from the same Abrahamic source.

However, the Arab Islamic countries have acquired great importance in the political and economic affairs of the world which has served to kindle greater interest in Islam in the West, resulting in the discovery of “new and hitherto unsuspected horizon.”⁸

Scholars have attributed different motives and objectives to the Orientalists’ endeavors. Some of the major motives of the Orientalists are given in this paper. Every individual has a natural desire to know about other nations and to grasp their ideas, cultures and religions. This natural desire is one of the motives of Orientalism. It led the western Orientalists to know the eastern part of the globe. They made systematic efforts to understand the eastern intellectual heritage.⁹ East and West have had mutual ties since time immemorial. Their relation kept on changing and took different dimension in different periods of time. On one occasion, they have engaged in ideological dialogue and on other in military conflict. The varying engagement—both ideological and military—has insistently motivated the Orientalists to learn more and more about their eastern rival.¹⁰

According to Shakaib Arasalan, the relation of East and West reflects perpetual conflict. The clash and conflict between them aggravate and subsides but never ceases to exist.¹¹ The meteoric rise of the Muslims compelled the western scholars to investigate who they are, where they belong to, and why they have come from?¹² Some people in the west considered it a disgrace and humiliation for themselves to see the ascendancy of the Islamic civilization over the Roman and Greek civilizations. The eulogizers of Roman and Greek civilization refused to recognize and appreciate the superiority of Islamic civilization.¹³ They could not tolerate their rival; nevertheless, mere abhorrence of the rival could bring no good, therefore they earmarked upon their journey of knowing their rival’s philosophy, language, literature and religion.¹⁴

It is a historical fact that the ecclesiastic figures have always endeavored to distort certain facts about Islam. In order to distort the facts, it was necessary to know the real Islam, hence the clergy turned to the study of Islam. It has been one of Orientalists’ purposes to divert the attention of Christian masses from the truth of Islam as well as to proselytize adherents of other religions into their own Christian faith. To achieve this goal, they have been at pains to create doubts and suspicions about

primary sources of Islam.¹⁵ A group of Orientalists have played vital role in engendering doubts about the holy Qur'an, Ahadith, Fiqh, Islamic History etc.

Rudolf Rudi Paret (1901-1983), a prominent German Orientalist, remarks that the contemporary orientalists' endeavor is to prove Islam as a false religion and to attract and convert Muslims to Christianity. Rudi Paret further adds that in the Middle Ages, a large number of Christians turned to the study of Islam so as to distort the truths of Islam and to malign and denigrate the personality of the prophet of Islam. The reason for why they did so was their conviction that whatever is against Christianity is evil.¹⁶

To stop the rapid spread of Islam in the West and to prevent the conversion of Christian population to Islam, the Orientalists deliberately poisoned the minds of people against Islam. Consequently, the European minds were filled with abomination, grudges and prejudice against Islam.¹⁷ The former British prime minister and political leader William E. Gladstone (1809-1898) once said it is impossible for Europe to dominate the East as long as the Qur'an exists, rather it would be appropriate to say that Europe should not feel secure in presence of the Qur'an.¹⁸

W. Montgomery Watt considers the holy Qur'an to be a voice from the unconscious of the prophet (peace be upon him). As he remarks: "what seems to man to come from outside himself, may actually come from his unconscious." ¹⁹With reference to Bell, he further adds that "from an early point in his prophetic career, Muhammad thought of the separate revelations he was receiving as constituting a single Quran. After he had been a year or two in Medinah, however, he thought of them as constituting, which it was his task to produce."²⁰

George Sale believes Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be the author of the holy Qur'an. He writes that "Muhammad was really the author and chief contriver of the Koran is beyond doubt." ²¹ About the collection of the holy Qur'an, John Burton writes that the collection of the Quran was initiated much after the demise of the prophet.²²

Muhammad (peace be upon him) wanted to compose a book for his community similar to what Jesus gave to the Christians and Moses to the Jews but he died before accomplishing his task. His Quran is what his followers could gather after his death. They name their the corpus of his revelations as Quran.²³

The Orientalists produced a lot of literature to generate doubts in the minds of the believers. For instance, Theodor Noldeke (1836-1930) argues that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the author of the holy Qur'an. He terms wahi (revelation) as the 'uncontrollable excitement' of the prophet (peace be upon him). He compares the moments of revelation as the poetic frenzy of a poet. Noldeke writes:

"How these revelations actually arose in Muhammad's mind is a question which is almost as idle to discuss as it would be to analyze the workings of the mind of a poet. In his early career, sometimes perhaps in its later stages also, many revelations must have burst from him in uncontrollable excitement, so that he could not possibly regard them otherwise than as divine inspirations. We must bear in mind that he was no cold systematic thinker, but an oriental visionary, brought up in crass superstition and without intellectual discipline: a man whose nervous temperament has been

powerfully worked on by ascetic austerities, and who was all the more irritated by the opposition he encountered, because he had little of the heroic in his nature. Filled with his religious ideas and visions he might well fancy he heard the angel bidding him to recite what was said to him.”²⁴

He creates doubts about the authenticity of the holy Qur’an by remarking Uthman’s Qur’an was incomplete. His Quran is clearly fragmentary. Some passages which were originally part of the Quran are now extinct. Although they have been omitted by Zaid, among these are some which there is no reason to suppose Muhammad desired to suppress. Zaid may easily have overlooked a few stray fragments, but that he purposely omitted anything which he believed to belong to the Qur’an is very unlikely. Some scholars conjecture that in reverence to his superiors he omitted the names of Muhammad’s foes, if they or their families came afterwards to be respected.²⁵

Another Orientalist William St. Clair Tisdal (1859-1928) wrote a book entitled ‘The Original Sources of the Qur’an’ whose quintessence is that the holy Qur’an is not a divine book; it is rather a blend of ideas, beliefs and stories derived from the then prevalent religions. He maintains that the prophet of Islam fabricated revelation and then tried to convince his followers to believe that was revealed to him by Allah. Clair Tisdal writes: “ when the surahs are arranged in their chronological order of their composition and compared with the events in Muhammad’s life, we see that there is much truth in the statement that the passages were—not , as Muslims say, revealed, but—composed from time to time as occasion required, to sanction each new departure made by Muhammad.” He further adds that the holy Qur’an is written by Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself as it reflects his life on different occasions and depicts his character. He observes: that Qur’an is a realistic depiction of the life of its author. It is a faithful account of life in the desert. It makes us hear the war-slogans Muhammad’s followers as they rushed towards their enemies. It takes us into the mind of the prophet and shows the gradual decline of his character as he passed from the earnest and sincere though visionary enthusiast into the conscious imposter and open sensualist.²⁶

Thomas Carlyle remarks about the Holy Qur’an: “ A wearisome confused jumble crude, incondite, endless iterations, long windedness, entanglement, most crude, incondite, insupportable stupidity... in short, nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran.”²⁷

As mentioned above that the Orientalists have always struggled to disseminate doubts about the original sources of Islam, they invariably criticized the authenticity of hadiths much in the same fashion as they did about the holy Qur’an. The attitude of the Orientalists moved from ‘early skepticism’ to a ‘reaction against skepticism’ then to ‘search a middle ground’ and finally it reached ‘neo-skepticism’.²⁸

Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) observes that hadiths were concocted much later. According to him, fabrication, dissemination prophetic traditions started in early period of Islam. An instruction given to his obedient governor al-Mughirah by Muawiyah-I is in the spirit of Umayyads: Do not tire of abusing and insulting Ali and calling for God’s meritedness for Uthman.²⁹ Goldziher believes that the fabrication of hadiths increased all the more during the Umayyad period. According to him, the religious scholars fabricated traditions in order to curb the outrageous oppression of the rulers. To Goldziher, the rulers were also actively generating traditions to encounter the traditions fabricated by the religious scholars. They invented plenty of traditions because they knew the political value of

such traditions. He argues that this must now makes us believe that during this period religious scholars were alone were working hard on the traditions. The ruling power itself was not idle. If it wished an opinion to be generally recognized and the opposition of pious circles silenced, it too had to know how to discover a hadith to suit its purpose. They had to do what their opponents did: invent, or have invented, hadiths in their turn. And that is in effect what they did.³⁰

Josef Schacht (1902-1969), following his predecessor Goldziher, observes that those traditions which have legal and juristic value were fabricated after Imam Shafi and Imam Malik. In his view, Muhammadan legal science began in the later phase of the Umayyad period, taking the legal practice of the time as its raw material and endorsing, modifying, or rejecting it.³¹ In preface to his book 'An Introduction to Islamic Law', Schacht describes the aim of the book in the following words: to prove that a huge number of hadiths with legal contents, which appear in the classical collections, originated after Malik and Shafi'i.³² He further adds the primary purpose of present chapter is to give a solid starting point for the systematic use of hadiths as documents for the development of legal doctrine, by investigating the evolution of legal traditions in the literary period, roughly from A.H 150 to 250, between Abu Hanifa and the classical collections of traditions, with a few extensions into the first half of the second century.

Schacht attempts to make the isnad look untrustworthy and fake. In the same books he maintains that some of those isnad which are usually considered highly reliable Muslim scholars are the result of widespread fabrication in the generation preceding Malik. The isnad have been carelessly put together. Any typical representative of the group whose doctrine was to be projected back on to an ancient authority, could be chosen at random and put into the isnad.³³

Onto the character of Muhammad in the Middle Ages was heaped a bundle of attributes that corresponded to "character of [twelfth-century] prophet of the 'Free Spirit' who did actually arise in Europe, and claimed credence and collect followers." Similarly, since Muhammad viewed as the disseminator of a false Revelation, he became as well the epitome of lechery, debauchery, sodomy, and a whole battery of assorted treacheries, all of which derived "logically" from his doctrinal imposture.³⁴

One constraint acting upon Christian thinkers who tried to understand Islam was an analogical one; since Christ is the basis of Christian faith, it was assumed—quite incorrectly—that Muhammad was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity. Hence the polemic name "Muhammadism" given to Islam, and the automatic epithet "imposter" applied to Muhammad.³⁵ Out of such and many other misconceptions "there formed a circle which was never broken by imaginative exteriorization... the Christian concept of Islam was integral and self-sufficient. ³⁶ Islam became an image whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christians.³⁷

"Maometto"—Muhammad—appears in the canto 28 of the Inferno. He is located in the eighth of the nine circles of Hell, in the ninth of tenth Bolgias of Malebolge, and circle of gloomy ditches surrounding Satan's stronghold in Hell. Thus before Dante reaches Muhammad, he passes through circles containing people whose sins are of a lesser order: the lustful, the avaricious, gluttonous, the heretics, the wrathful, the suicidal, the blasphemous. After Muhammad there are only the falsifiers and the treacherous (who include Judas, Brutus, Cassius) before one arrives at the bottom of Hell, which is

where Satan himself has to be found. Muhammad thus belongs to a rigid hierarchy of evils, in the category of what Dante calls *seminator di scandalo e di scisma*. Muhammad's punishment, which is also his eternal fate, is a peculiarly disgusting one: he is endlessly being cleft in two from his chin to his anus like, Dante says, a cask whose staves are ripped apart. Dante's verse at this point spares the reader none of the eschatological details that so vivid a punishment entails: Muhammad's entrails and his excrement are described with unflinching accuracy.³⁸

Muhammad explains his punishment to Dante, pointing as well to Ali, who precedes him in the line of sinners whom the attendant devil is splitting in two: he also asks Dante to warn one Fra Dolcino, a renegade priest whose sect advocated community of women and goods and who was accused of having a mistress, of what will be in store for him. It will not have been lost on the reader that Dante saw a parallel between Dolcino's and Muhammad's revolting sensuality, and also between their pretention to theological eminence.³⁹

The Orientalists have deliberately cast aspersions on the personality of the prophet of Islam so as to prevent the spread of the religion he preached. In the Middle Ages they termed him as 'liar' and 'impostor'. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, his claim to prophet-hood was seen as 'innocent delusion' or a 'psychological disorder'.⁴⁰ Alloys Sprenger (1813-1893) portrays him as a superstitious man who believes in magic and other sorts of supernatural things. Sprenger remarks: the prophet was not free from superstitions; he believed in jins, omens and charms, and he has many superstitious habits. The jins were, according to his opinion of three kinds: some have wings and fly; others are snakes and dogs; and those of the third kind move about from place to place like men. Again, some of them believed in him, and others did not.⁴¹ With reference to Surah Zuhra verse No. 7, Sprenger aims to prove that Muhammad (peace be upon him) worshiped idols before his claim of being a prophet. He writes: "upto his fortieth year Muhammad devoutly worshiped the gods of his fathers."⁴² At the age of forty, doubts about the idol-worship arose in his mind. Muslims consider this internal crisis as divine inspiration.⁴³ Sprenger considers his revelation as sheer visions and dreams. In his opinion, undisturbed meditation increased his excitement, and his over-strained brains were, even in sleep, occupied with doubts and speculations. In one of his visions, he saw an angel, who said to him 'read'.⁴⁴ He says that Muhammad (peace be upon him) suffered from hallucinations. To get rid of his suffering, he contemplated suicide. His acts alarmed his friends. Some attribute his conduct to the 'eccentricities of a poetical genius' others thought him to be a kahin; but majority looked upon him as insane.⁴⁵ Sprenger moves on to add that Eastern people ascribe melancholy and madness to supernatural influence therefore, they thought that he was overpowered by Satan and his agents.⁴⁶

David Samuel Margoliouth (1858-1940) also wants to prove that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the author of the holy Qur'an. In this regard, he maintains that the prophet of Islam learnt a great deal about Christianity during his journey to Syria. He writes that some information regarding Christianity may have been derived from Christians slaves or Arabs. Muhammad had drawn major portion of his knowledge of Christianity from Syria through the same Jewish medium which had already provided him with plenty of details of the Jewish history.⁴⁷

William Montgomery Watt (1909-2006) went in a little different direction. He extolled the prophet (peace be upon him) very much, but he did not accept him as a prophet. Such praise and appreciation on the part of the writer often misleads the reader to consider the writer as unprejudiced and

objective. According Watt, Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a man in whom creative imagination worked at deep levels. His fertile and rich imagination produced ideas pertaining to crucial questions of human existence. That's why his religion generated widespread appeal among not only in his own but also in the succeeding generations. However, Watts maintains that not all the ideas he preached are true and sound, but he did give millions of men better religion than the one they professed before.⁴⁸

Europe constantly looked upon the Islamic Orient and Arabs as an alarmingly difficult challenge on economic, political as well as intellectual levels. For a great part of history, Orientalism reflected a problematic European attitude towards the religion of Islam. Islam, undoubtedly, remained a source of provocation in different ways. Both culturally and geographically, Islam lay remained uncomfortably close to Christianity.⁴⁹

That western world could not ignore the fact that Islam had outstripped and outshone. It is patently reflected in the following lines from Gibbon's famous book the Decline and Fall. Gibbon says that in the triumphant days of the Roman Republic the senate confined their councils and legions to a single war, and entirely to suppress and hold a first enemy before they initiated a battle against their second enemy. These timorous points of policy were scorned by the magnanimity or fervor of the Arabian caliphs. With the same sense of triumph they assailed the successors of Artaxerxes and Augustus; and the Rival monarchies at the same instant became the prey of an adversary whom they had long been accustomed to loathe. In the ten years of the administration of Umer, the Saracens reduced to their obedience to thirty-six thousand cities and castles, devastated four thousand churches or places of worship of the nonbelievers, and constructed fourteen hundred mosques for Muslim worshippers. One hundred years after his exodus from Mecca, the arms and the reign of his successors extended from India to the Atlantic Ocean., over the numerous and aloof provinces.⁵⁰

This "militant Orient" came to signify what Henri Baudet termed as " the Asiatic tidal wave" Orientalists rigorously advocated the imperial cause. William Jones, who had mastered Arabic, Persian and Hebrew, was appointed to a "profitable' and "honorable" place in Indies. He was designedly appointed with East India Company to "gather in, rope off and domesticate the Orient."⁵¹

Jones acquired a deep understanding and profound knowledge of the East which made him the unquestioned founder of Orientalism. Jones's principal objectives were to acquire knowledge about the Orient, to compare it with the Occident and to rule it.⁵²

Edward Said remarks that there exists a liberal unanimous consensus that true knowledge is essentially non-political and conversely political knowledge is not "true knowledge". Knowledge produced and colored by certain political circumstances is highly obscure.⁵³

It goes without saying that knowledge in the domain of human sciences necessarily contains the personality and the prejudices of the author. It also applies to those Europeans and Americans who studied the Orient under certain circumstances. An American orientalist is an American first and as

an individual second. Similarly, a European author who writes about the Orient is European first, as individual second. It means that they are fully cognizant of the fact that they belong to a power which has specific interest in the Orient. Additionally, they are conscious of the fact that they belong to a part of the earth with “a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer”.

54

One of the major reasons which stimulated interest in the study of the Orient was the revolution in the Biblical studies by various pioneers with various interests such as Eichhorn, Bishop Lwoth, Micchaelis and Herder.⁵⁵

Besides, it hardly needs a mention that “ because the Middle East is now so identified with Great Power politics, Oil economics, and the simple-minded dichotomy of freedom-loving, democratic Israel and evil, totalitarian, the terroristic Arabs, the chances of anything like a clear view of what one talks about I talking about the Near East or depressingly small.⁵⁶

Orientalists have drawn dichotomous comparisons between the Orient and the Occident. The relation between them has been articulated variously. Cromer and Balfour employed several expressions: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, different”; thus the “European is rational, virtuous, mature, normal”.⁵⁷

According to Cromer, for an imperial administrator the “proper study is also men”. He maintained that when Alexander Pope said that the proper study of mankind was man, in Cromer’s opinion, it also included “the poor Indians”. “where as Cromer “also” reminds us that certain men, such as Orientals, can be singled out as the subject for proper study.”⁵⁸

As far as Islam is concerned, the European mind harbored fear about it, if not always reverence. After the demise of the prophet of Islam in 632, the cultural hegemony and the religious supremacy grew immensely. The Muslims armies first conquered Syria, Persia, and Egypt and then Turkey and then North Africa. In the 8th and 9th centuries, Spain, Sicily and some parts of France were conquered. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries India, China and Indonesia came under the rule of Islam. And to this incredibly extraordinary invasion Europe could react with little except “fear and kind of awe.” The typical Christian portrait of the eastern armies can be precisely articulated in the words of Erchembert: they resembled a huge swarm of bees, but with a heavy hand...they overwhelmed everything.⁵⁹

To the European minds, Islam symbolized devastation, terror and they saw Muslims as a demonic horde of detested barbarians. Europe regarded Islam as an enduring trauma. Until the end of the 17th century the Ottoman hazard existed menacingly close to Europe and the entire Christian civilization. Gradually, the that civilization incorporated that “ peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life”⁶⁰

In the western part of the world, the message of the holy Quran was designedly distorted to frighten the Christians. The distorted teachings and doctrines of Islam were readily accepted by the Christians. What Muslims really believed was neglected, extravagantly distorted forms were popularized, and facts were ignored, however, the general outline of Islamic teachings and beliefs was never abandoned. The common framework persisted however the shades varied. When the

intellectual accuracy of the accounts came under criticism, they made some corrections to lend credibility to their description. Notwithstanding, Christian view was too hard to be smashed. ⁶¹

R.W. Southern has exquisitely shown that by the middle of the fifteenth century prominent European scholars seriously thought “that something would have to be done about Islam,” which had slightly changed the situation by itself reaching militarily in Eastern Europe. ⁶²

In this regard, he relates a dramatic episode between 1450 and 1460 when well-read people like Nicholas of Cusa, Johan of Segovia, Aeneas Silvius (Pious II) and Jean Germain attempted to engage with Islam through Contraferentia or conference. The idea was propounded by Johan of Segovia. The original purpose of the contraferentia was to bring about the conversion of Muslim population.⁶³ The idea being for Christians to make it clear to Muslims that Islam was just an erroneous variety of Christian religion.⁶⁴

According to Southern, the European Christians miserably failed to give a persuasive and satisfying exposition of what Islam really was. Therefore, their inability to influence the actual course of practical events is unmistakably conspicuous. At practical level, intelligent observers predicted pleasant as well as unpleasant events but their predictions proved wrong. It is worth mentioning that the events never turned out better when the scholarly judges boldly predicted and confidently expected a happy ending. He expresses his conviction that in Christian knowledge of Islam some progress did occur. He further stresses the fact that: “Even if the solution of the problem remained stubbornly veiled from sight, the statement of the problem became more intricate, more rational and more related to experience... the academics who worked hard at the problem of Islam in the Middle Ages failed to find the solution they wanted; but they developed habits of minds and powers of comprehension which, in other men in other fields, may yet deserve success.”⁶⁵

Southern has thoroughly analyzed the various dimensions of Christian understanding of Islam but the most significant part of his analysis is his view that it is finally western ignorance which became more refined and complex, not some body of positive knowledge which increases in size and accuracy.⁶⁶

We find that it was popularly believed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that being closely located to the Christian world, Arabia provided a safe refuge to the heretical outlaws.⁶⁷ Moreover, it was commonly believed that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a cunning apostate. In the twentieth century an erudite orientalist specialist will be the one to inform his reader that Islam was but “second-order Arian heresy.”⁶⁸

Famous writers like Dante also presented Islam in very negative colors. He has shown a group of Muslims being tormented in the Inferno. They include Averroes, Avicenna and Saladin. With them are shown pious heathens namely, Abraham, Hector, Plato, Socrates and Aristotle confined to the upper circle of the Inferno in order to suffer an honorable and minimum punishment for being bereft of the benefit of the Christian revelation.⁶⁹

It hardly needs saying that Dante admires these legends for their incredible achievements and marvelous virtues and qualities but he reprobated them merely because they were not Christians.

Napoleon issued rigorous instructions to his Deputy Klebler to govern Egypt through orientalists and those religious leaders whose support and assistance could be easily obtained. To him any other politics was insufferably expensive and extremely foolish. The European Orientalists, trained and tutored by Sylvestre de Sacy proved themselves politically beneficial for the imperial cause. Sylvestre de Sacy was the first Arabic teacher at Ecole Publique de langues orientales.⁷⁰

Orientalists negatively portrayed the Arabs as hook-nosed people, camel riders, horrific venal lechers whose abundant underserved wealth is a disgrace and insult to genuine civilization. In their opinion, the only true human being is the westerner and therefore only he has the privilege to own and expand the resources of the world. Due to the “the hegemonism of possessing minorities and anthropocentrism allied with Eurocentrism”, the white westerner believes that is his exclusive right to possess and manage the non-white world.⁷¹

To the white westerner, the sword of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Quran are the most tenacious enemies of civilization, liberty and the Truth which the world has recently discovered.⁷² The colonial powers have always craved for the oriental territory and in their desire to own their resources, the Orientals were seldom seen or looked at; they were seen through, they were analyzed as citizens and they were considered as problems to be solved, confined and taken over.⁷³

Burchardt looked down upon Islam as trivial, bare and wretched.⁷⁴ Snouck Hurgrone studied Islam and was appointed as an advisor to assist the Dutch government in handling the Muslim Indonesian colonies. Likewise, the colonial administration from North Africa to Pakistan sought the precious advice and expertise of erudite Orientalists namely, Macdonald and Massignon.⁷⁵

To Lord Curzon, the Orient was an enormous geographical space entirely possessed by an adequately competent colonial master. He said that their nation prepares and sends governors and administrators and judges, teachers and preachers and lawyers to the east.⁷⁶ He reckoned oriental studies as an indispensable part of the British responsibility to the east.

Addressing the House of Lords, he said that their familiarity with people of the east, with their ways of life, their languages, their religions and their history was the sole basis upon which their power and hegemony was built. He told them that their ability to fathom what may be called “the genius of the East” is the basis upon which it is likely to maintain their future position. And any step that could help to strengthen the prized position would be considered worthy of his Majesty’s attention. He considered oriental studies as a necessary part of the British responsibility to the East.

To Lord Curzon, oriental studies was not intellectual luxury, they were rather a great imperial obligation. He considered the creation of a school for oriental studies as inseparably essential part of the “necessary furniture of Empire.”⁷⁷

Edward Said argues that Orientalism is not always evil, or sloppy or invariably the same in the writings of all Orientalists, but he does contend that the Orientalists have a very long history of connivance and collusion with the imperial power. According to him, it would be ‘Panglossian’ to call the relation between imperial power and Orientalism as irrelevant. As in his criticism of Bernard Lewis, he points out that the latter attempts to conceal his ideological underpinnings in his verbosity

but fails. Lewis couches his “ahistorical and political assertions” in the garb of an intellectual argument, a typical practice followed by old-fashioned colonial Orientalists.⁷⁸

The European interest in Islam was not based on its curiosity but it rather stemmed from a dread of a monotheistic, militarily and culturally formidable competitor to the Christian faith. Numerous historians have persuasively shown that the Earliest European scholars of Islam were medieval Christian polemicists whose aim was to counter the threat of Muslim hordes and apostasy. The combination of fear and hostility toward Islam is exhibited in their scholarly as well as non-scholarly attention to this faith to the present day.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, American journalists and scholars rushed to present the Orientalized Islam as a new “Empire of Evil”. As a result, the print and electronic media started presenting debasing stereotypes and conflating Orient and oppression, Arabs and aggression, and Islam and terrorism.⁷⁹

In 1993 Paul Johnson Published an essay entitles “Colonialism’s Back—and not a moment too soon” whose primary theme was that the “Civilized nations” should shoulder the important responsibility to re-colonize Third World Countries “where the most basic conditions of civilized life had broken down.” The model of Paul Johnson is clearly a nineteenth-century colonial one. He asserts that the Europeans would not able to trade profitably until they successfully impose political order.

To justify colonization of the Orient, the imperial powers have derived much of their knowledge and information about Islam from the orientalist scholarship. Even today numerous western scholars of Islam actively work for governments. They include writers like Robert Spencer whose erroneous anti-Islam tropes and rhetoric continue to malign Islam and create fear and hatred against Muslims. Their negative stereotyping strengthens governments whose aim is economic exploitation, aggression or complete domination of Islamic countries.

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