

WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH
ON THE MEANING OF RELIGION AND ISLAM:
A PLURALIST DILEMMA REEXAMINED

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Abstract

Wilfred Cantwell Smith deserves attention for the following two reasons: his critical, straightforwardness against the conventional Christian and Western secular viewpoints on religion and his interest for, and yet deconstructive insights, on the meaning of Islam. Smith indeed, was a scholar of a versatile academic background. He was a Christian theologian and a pluralist who rejected exclusivism (as a position in religion), a historian of religion and a phenomenologist who struggled to live the meaning of the sacred and the profane (in his redefinition of religion) and a missiologist who was fascinated with Islam (and yet deconstructed its meaning). This article relies heavily on textual, critical and comparative analysis and reexamines Smith's understanding of religion and Islam. It is supposed that his ideas on religion and Islam were much shaped by his pluralist stance.

Introduction

William Cantwell Smith is a contemporary Western scholar who has criticized the modern/Western intellectual venture on the study of religion. His criticism lies on the Western definition which perceives religion as an observable phenomenon, a defined, fixed and distinguishable system. In Smith's opinion, such a definition was nurtured by and resulted into an exclusive position for religion. The exclusive religion position can only distort mutual relations among the so-called world religions.

Structurally, this paper is divided into two parts. Part one generally discusses Smith's definition of religion and its relation

with religious pluralism. The second part examines his views on the term *Islām* which means only submission in its general sense, thus ignoring all the other meanings, such as it being the name, the definition of the religion revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other significations.

William Cantwell Smith on the Definition of Religion

Smith, in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, boldly criticized the modern/Western intellectual venture on the study of religion. His criticism lies on the Western definition which perceives religion as an observable phenomenon, a defined, fixed and distinguishable system. In Smith's opinion, such a definition was nurtured by and resulted in an exclusive position in religion. What he regarded as exclusive primarily refers to the approaches adopted and the conclusion derived from the study of religion. He believed that the modern/Western scholar studies religion from a perspective of an observer—an outsider rather than a participant of particular faith who has firsthand experience on the religion under study. Smith, on the hand, is convinced that however “only a Christian can understand the Christian faith and only a Muslim can understand Islam... Therefore one who study religion forms the perspective of an observer and an outsider and assumes that he knows or understands the religion. In reality, should he fail to experience himself the religion, his analysis falls short.

In the Western study of religion, the issue of defining and studying religion has always been executed from such an observer, an outsider perspective under which religions were given their name.¹ This also explains the reason for the identification of many/plural religions and that each and every religion is different from and opposed to each other.² What has been taking place in the process actually was that the modern scholar had been defining religion based on his observation on the cultural trait of a particular religion handed down from one generation to another and

¹ With the exception to Islam, Prophet Muhammad did not found it. Islam is a religion named by Allah in the Quran.

² Smith regarded this as a differentiation process.

conferred the name of their religion. This is called the evolving Western concept of religion; an observer who regard himself as an outsider, who defined a particular religion by its culture and ended up concluding religion as an external objective systematic entity. The main problem with this Western concept, according to Smith, lies in the differentiation which is the exclusion of faiths other than one's own for they are in conflict with his.

In replacement of such a Western definition, Smith offers two terms—faith and cumulative tradition—the two elements mistakenly understood by religion. Faith refers to an inner experience or involvement and impingement on man of the transcendent; it has universal quality and foundational category for all religious life, too personal, too divine for public exposition and therefore not directly observable. Faith that can only be understood as an expression of faith then is a personal quality with many sorts of expression. The faith of men in all communities is not the same. In fact any one man's faith is different on any given morning from the proceeding afternoon. Faith is indeed the transcendent real of one's religious tradition.

Cumulative tradition is the objective date, the historical deposit transmitted from one person, one generation to another. The human construct can take many forms and indeed the expression of man's faith. Cumulative tradition, therefore, is empirically and historically knowable. As long as they are mundane, they are contingent. Since cumulative tradition is produce historical entities, they evolve and are adaptive to changes, for they are human constructs.

In this connection, religion is divided into two realms: the transcendent realm pertains to the fit, and the secular real pertain to the cumulative tradition. The former being belong to the transcendent, remain mysterious, undiscovered and veiled from human knowledge, and the latter being is a mundane expression of faith and a pure human construct.

At the very basic, this seems to be a dualistic perspective. The question arises when Smith stipulated that faith is beyond human comprehension for it belongs to the transcendent. The cumulative tradition, on the other hand, is the domain under which

the study of religion falls. Smith tries to justify his conviction that cumulative tradition is a purely human engagement, and therefore it is relative. Nonetheless, how cumulative tradition relates with faith remains unsolved. For this reason, no one religious tradition is certain. The cumulative tradition, indeed a mundane and profane dimension of religion under which its relation to faith, the sacred, remains unexplained.

Smith's criticism on religion is advocated in *The Meaning and End of Religion* where he invalidated the evolving Western conception of religion that perceives religion as an objective systematic entity; a system of ideas or beliefs and practices in which men of faith were involved or with which men of potential faith are confronted.³ In this regard, religion is regarded as something definite and fixed⁴ specific, distinguishable, observable, and a defined system.⁵ He regarded the meaning as distorted and inappropriate in explaining the religious phenomenon of man. Unfortunately such a definition has been widely accepted by the modern intellectual circles throughout the centuries.

The problem with such an understanding, according to Smith, is that it concerns only the external observable part which constitutes religion and ignores the most important inner part of

³ The development of religion as a concept, according to Smith, begins with the Renaissance and expands with the Reformation, changes with the Enlightenment and develops in the 19th Century. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, p.32.

⁴ Religion in the Western definition leads to four distinct meanings of religion. Religion as a sense of personal piety, as an ideal system, as a system of an empirical historical and sociological phenomenon, and finally, religion as 'a generic summation'; 'religion in general.' The second and the third accounts perceive religion as overt systems distinguished by, and comprising, certain beliefs, practices and values, involved in a certain period of time, allied to one particular area and particular community. Smith argues that the first discriminates religion in a man's life from indifference. The second and the third discriminate one religion from another, and the fourth discriminates religion from other aspects of human life, such as art or economics.

⁵ Ibid, p.49.

religion, that is, the relation with the transcendent.⁶ As Smith said “the participant is concerned with God; the observer has been concerned with ‘religion’.”⁷ He, in this regard believed that the concept of religion is established from the observer’s point of view, who unfortunately is an outsider, and thereupon, the conception is far from accurate and is unreliable.⁸

This means that the observer who is an outsider is not in a position to fully grasp the observed religion. Why is this so? Smith believed strongly that to know a religion was not to know the religious life of the man whom one observes. To understand Christianity, for example, or to think that one does is not the same as understanding Christians. Following Smith, religion is very much understood as tradition and that one’s tradition is very much dependent upon one’s cultural background. Smith further believed that it is culture that conceptualizes the aspects of human life and

⁶ Ibid, p.128. Smith regretted that the word religion, apart from being celebrated by the intellectual enterprise of modernity, has stood between man and God. Smith believes that God does not reveal religions: He reveals Himself. Pursuing his argument, Smith replaces the word God for transcendent, for he believes that the latter is more relevant to all religious traditions. This is obvious as he asserted that; “Not only do reifying concepts of ‘a religion’, in terms such as ‘Buddhism’ and ‘Zoroastrianism’, misrepresent by freezing the inherently personal, living quality of men’s religiousness. Further, they do so by omitting not only the vitality, but the most significant of all factors in that vitality, namely, its relation with transcendence. The observer’s concept of a religion is by definition constituted of what can be observed. Yet the whole pith and substance of religious life lies in its relation to what cannot be observed.” Ibid, p.136

⁷ Ibid, p. 131.

⁸ Smith content that:...only a Christian can understand the Christian faith, only a Muslim can understand Islam, and so on. The observer’s concept of religion is beautifully suited to ignore it. The participant can see very clearly that the outsider may know all about a religious system, and yet may totally miss the point. The outsider may intellectually command all the details of its external facts, and yet may be – indeed, as an outsider, presumably must be or demonstratively is – untouched by the heart of the matter, Ibid, p.134

society, later to be envisaged by the West as religion.⁹ It is from such cultural traits that one religious system is conferred with its name by the West; Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, thus making the point that religion is a product of culture handed down from one generation to another.¹⁰ Therefore, one's attempt to understand other religions should draw from a cross-cultural stance, yet Smith is somehow skeptical about this: "The important matter in the life of any religious community is what their religious tradition does to them. This is not easy for an outsider to ascertain. Yet if he is to succeed at all, he will need to conceptualize it in personal, not impersonal terms."¹¹

In addition to that, Smith believed that the existing conception of religion has finally led to a differentiation process, religion in a variety of minor forms and identified as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on, later to be phrased as "religions of the world", indicating the plural religions.¹²

This is the very same attitude that was imparted to Islam. The early reference to it as Mohammedanism is a case @@ point. See Mohamed Ajmal bin Abdul Razak Al-Aidrus. "Hick's Pluralism and Rumi's Mathnawi: The Continued Propagation of Misappropriated Lines. *Al-Shajarah*. 16:1. 141-150. See also, Mohamed Ajmal bin Abdul Razak Al-Aidrus. *Christians in Search of a Name for God: The Right to Allah*. ISTAC-IIUM, Kuala Lumpur 2013.

Indeed, such naming and identification of one religion is the

⁹ Smith believed very much that this is the way the West has managed to formulate its notion of its own religious system under the terms Christianity and Judaism.

¹⁰ Believing so, it answers why Smith had preferably replaced religion with tradition thereupon giving an impetus to his entire idea of religion.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 136.

¹² This is the very same attitude that was imparted to Islam. The early reference to it as Mohammedanism is a case in point. See Mohamed Ajmal bin Abdul Razak Al-Aidrus. "Hick's Pluralism and Rumi's *Mathnawi*: The Continued Propagation of Misappropriated Lines. *Al-Shajarah*. 16:1. 141-150. See also, Mohamed Ajmal bin Abdul Razak Al-Aidrus. *Christians in Search of a Name for God: The Right to Allah*. ISTAC-IIUM, Kuala Lumpur 2013.

ultimate development of the evolving Western conception of religion (as an external objective systematic entity) and this is basically, what he disagreed with. Reasoning his objection, Smith verified that:¹³

The intellectualizing of the concept 'religion' was part of the emerging claim of the mind to understand the universe and assert its domination; but it was part, also, of a response to the strident claims of many religious groups to refute each other.¹⁴

This quotation underlines two important points that explain the origin of religion as a term. The first point that Smith emphasised on was the fact that the enthusiastic rational attempt of mankind was meant to understand the universe in order to dominate it. The second point, which is indeed the highlight of this research, was Smith's accusation that such a rational quest on the meaning of religion was a part of the attempt by the religious groups to refute each other. Firm with his belief, Smith precisely asserted that religion as a systematic entity, as it emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, is a concept of polemics and apologetics.¹⁵ In this regard, he believed that the term religion not only distinguished one man's faith, but also served as a discrimination point in which men of other potential faiths are confronted. On this account, it is interpreted that Smith's invalidation of the conception of religion, the distortion and inadequacy of the term religion, the differentiation and naming of one religion, and finally the rejection of religions other than one's own, was an implicit account of Smith's disapproval of the exclusive position in religion. It is at this point that Smith's appraisal of the spirit of religious pluralism is perceived. Note how he is against the position of the exclusives aspect of religion as he asserted that:

¹³ Ibid, p.122.

¹⁴ Wilfred Cantwell. Smith, *Towards A World Theology*, p.42.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.43.

Some would agree that the world community must have some religious basis, conceding that a lasting and peaceful society cannot be built either by men without faith, or by men of clashing faiths unreconcilable. They might go on to hold, however, that the only remedy is if their own one tradition prevail[s]. They allow no possibility that diverse groups should come to effective mutual understanding and acceptance. No doubt to some, it would seem nice if all men were Roman Catholics, or Communists, or liberal universalists, or if all men would agree that religion does not really matter, or that it should be kept a private affair. Apart, however, from those that find such a vision inherently less appealing, many others will agree that for the moment its realization seems in any case hardly likely. And even the evangelist missionary must in the modern world learn to respect and to understand other men's faith which he wishes to see superseded. Neither religious conviction nor judicious observation can gainsay the need for a better understanding of religious faith, including faith that one does not hope to share.¹⁶

The above quotation indicates that Smith is certain that the exclusive position in religion can do nothing to put an end to the existence of other religions. In fact, the exclusive religion will only distort mutual relations among the so-called world religions. Therefore, man is left with two options: either to retain the exclusive position in religion and to live in conflict and dissension or to retire the exclusiveness and establish a pluralistic account of other religions and choose to maintain peacefulness and serenity.

True enough the crux of religions is peace harmony and balance not violence and aggression. In the case of Islam, for instance, the concept of universalism manifests itself in an inclusive aspect of its teachings, particularly in dealing with other

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

religious adherents. Even though Islam is exclusive in its unique interpretation of *tawhīd*, however, this is based on Islam's view of humanity. From the Islamic viewpoint as human beings, we should make no distinction between the various different nations or peoples. Ultimately we are all a part of the creation of God. Therefore, there is no such thing as discriminating or degrading others since we are all God's creations and equally enjoy receiving the blessings or grace which comes from Him alone. In this respect, Islam presents to the world several very important principles which deal with the diversity of religion or belief as well as the concepts of race and the role of nations.¹⁷

Propagation of faith is not the same as compulsion in religion. Islamic *da'wah* is laid down based on the concept of invitation (*al-Nahl*:125). By Islamic *da'wah* here we mean politely inviting people to examine Islam as a way of life full of beauty and intelligent multi-faceted truth. We do not mean overzealous dogmatic preaching which intimidates. There are no such things like bribery, compulsion, threats, deception, manipulation and exploitation of the invitee's vulnerability such as hunger or illness.¹⁸

Unfortunately due to some propagators of wars and violence, religions have been misconstrued. Under the name of Islam some groups of Muslims have abused the concept of jihad which originally came about to establish absolute justice.

However, in order to maintain peace and serenity does not mean that we have to accept the concept of pluralistic account of other religions as suggested by Smith. In the case of Islam, it is both misguided and irrational to look for superficial similarities between different conceptions of God in Islam and other religions in order to advocate religious pluralism or a new 'transcendental' belief in the unity of all religions. For each religion has its own conceptual system and worldview from which the nature of God is developed and understood. Hence it is not justifiable for any

¹⁷ Ismail I-Faruqi *Islam and Other Faiths*: The Islamic Foundation: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998, 143-146

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,145

religious system to claim that it possesses the same conception of God's nature as that of Islam, whether exoterically or esoterically; whether it stays on earth or it transcends itself to any spiritual level!¹⁹

According to religious pluralism every religion is equally right. Herein lies the logical fallacy of pluralism, since the oneness of *tawhīd* is seen in Islam as being not only the unity they have tried to describe, but also the final stage in the evolution of spiritual development. It cannot be compared with partial understanding of that same oneness by those who have not yet come to grasp its completeness. They consider the variety of the world's religions as alternative ways or means along which men and women can find salvation, spiritual liberation, fulfillment and happiness provided they live and practice their own respective religions wholeheartedly and sincerely.²⁰ Such a belief is based on good intention, however, when utilized by those who are not prepared through the necessary path of *wilāyah* (guardianship), could have very dangerous results for both the student and the persons they misguide with their partial understanding of the true oneness. This belief was unfortunately accepted by a number of Muslim scholars who were inappropriately convinced that this is the true tolerant position of Islam towards the people of the book and other religious faiths.²¹

Smith's View on *Islām*

i) Islām as the Name of the Religion as a Recent Development

As we shall try to show, there are some misinterpretations in certain Islamic literature on the word Islam by giving new meanings to certain terms and ignoring clear-cut verses from the

¹⁹ Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995, Introduction.

²⁰ Fatimah Abdullah, "Equality of Religions: Islamic Response" in *Journal of Islam in Asia*, International Islamic University Malaysia, Issue No 6, July 2010.

²¹ *Prolegomena*, Introduction.

Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* which have confounded the writings of ancient and modern writers. In short they, “Displace words from their right places and meanings” as the Qur'ān (*al-Nisā'* (4): 46) described the ancient Jewish scholars. For example, Smith states that the word *Islām* has three meanings: “submission; the empirical reality of the world of *Islām* as it exists sociologically”; and the ideal Muslim community in a historical sense.²² He strongly rejects the meaning of the word *Islām* as the name of the religion revealed to Prophet Muhammad. We shall attempt to prove that Smith argues unconvincingly to show that the use of the term *Islām* as the name of a particular religion is a recent development. He claims that Muslims, like Christians and the followers of other religions, have gradually changed the meanings of religious terms as they became more conscious of themselves as a separate religious group and became more devoted to in-group feelings than to the original faith. Moreover, he argues that it is only recently (19th-20th centuries) that the term *Islām* has established itself as the name of a religion.²³ On the contrary the religion of Islam, from the very start was already mature, and was in not need of the process of maturation. As a revealed religion, Islam is conscious of itself from the very beginning; it originated from Divine Revelation not from the circumstances of history²⁴.

In refusing to accept the meaning of the word *Islām* as the name of the religion revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and practically limiting it to a vague concept of submission, Smith and such scholars as Frithjof Schoun and Jane Smith wished to bring *Islām* under the broad umbrella of the unity of religions. In doing so, as we have already mentioned, they go against the clear meanings of Qur'ānic verses and *aḥādīth* and

²² Wilfred Smith, *On Understanding Islam* (The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 174; hereinafter cited as *Understanding*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995, 4

confuse obvious reality with an intellectual and pedantic smoke-screen.

As a clear example, Smith says that, “Muslims and outsiders may disagree as to what Islam really is...Yet they may come together in discussing how specific persons at certain times and places have understood it.”²⁵ By such statements, scholars such as Smith had created doubts about the clear meanings of the term and created semantic confusion. In this we refer again to Smith as he proposes to perform an intensive research to ‘unearth’ the evolution of the meaning of the word *Islām*. He states:

The fundamentally rewarding task would be to make a study of the history of the word ‘Islām’; to discover the evolution of its usage and the meaning over the centuries and the variety of connotations that it has evinced in the course of its historical development. We have been recently reminded that ‘the history of [the] Muslim religion has yet to be written.’²⁶

“... The history of [the] Muslim religion has yet to be written” is not acceptable to us because it is not necessary to do so since Islam is not a historical religion that has undergone a historical process of evolution in line with changing circumstances. Indeed, as a revealed religion, Islam was already complete from the period of its inception. However this completeness refers to the meaning attributed to the term *Islām* which came to be the name of the religion as well. If, however, later generations of Muslims deviate from the complete Qur’ānic understanding, this will be similar to what the adherents of other distorted religions did to their religions, and as such the distorted understanding of *Islām* cannot be taken as a development over and above the original complete meaning with which Islam was endowed by the Qur’ān.²⁷

²⁵ Smith, *Understanding*, 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁷ Fatimah Abdullah, “Equality of Religions: Islamic Response” in *Journal of*

However, it must be obvious that such an invented confusion cannot cloud the striking clarity of Qur'ānic verses denouncing the *shirk* of Christianity, Judaism and other pagan religions nor can this confusion cloud the Qur'ānic verses unequivocally saying that “those who seek a religion other than Islam will not be accepted by God” (*Āli 'Imrān* (3): 85) or that “the true *dīn* accepted by God is Islam” (*Āli 'Imrān* (3): 19). To get around these problems, scholars who uphold the belief in a transcendent unity of religions avoid speaking about some verses and misinterpret others.

***Islām* as Nothing but Submission**

Of interest in this respect is the way Smith changes the meaning of the Qur'ānic verse of *Āli 'Imrān* 3: 19 so that it will enhance his position. He boldly writes:

I myself do not necessarily find a systematic, institutionalized sense even in the classic verses where it is customary nowadays to see the religion as being named. *Inna al-dīna 'inda Allāhi al-islām* (3: 19) may be read as stating the essential religious truth that ‘the proper way to worship God is to obey Him’. I will not however, repeat here my reason supporting this and similar interpretations. One may assert, however, that there is no instance in the Qur'ān where ... the dynamic sense of the term as personal faith is patently absurd or grammatically intolerable.²⁸

What Smith is really saying is that since *Islām* is nothing more than submission and since all religions profess some form of submission, then no religion can be properly called a religion without being a form of *Islām* or submission. We maintain that the word *al-dīn* in this context means ‘the religion’, and not ‘the proper way to worship’; and the word *al-islām* here does not mean simply ‘to obey’, which is merely one aspect of submission. The

Islam in Asia, International Islamic University Malaysia, Issue No 6, July 2010.

²⁸ Smith, *Understanding*, 47.

expression ‘the proper way to worship God’ necessarily implies improper ways of worshipping Him and such improper ways of worshipping Him amount to disobeying Him. This means that there are other ways (read: religions) of worshipping God that are not proper and that there is only one way that is proper which is given the name of *al-islām* because the form of submission (*al-islām*) is true to the command of God and approved by Him.²⁹ There are two forms of submission the willing and true kind (*taw‘an*) which follows the way of the Prophets, and the unwilling and false kind (*karhan*) which follows the inventions of the various religious traditions which do not emulate the way of the Prophets.³⁰

It is the conception of God (*tawḥīd*)³¹ which will then determine the truthfulness and falsity of a religion, and at this point, diversity occurs between *dīn* of Islam and other religions, for the unity of God in Islam is perceived differently from the unity of God in other religions. The Qur’ān explicitly points to this fact (*al-Kāfirūn* (109): 1-6). We read:

Say: “Unbelievers! I do not worship what you worship nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship neither will you worship what I worship. You have your own ‘religion’ and I have mine.”

And also Allāh said ;

God has borne witness that there is no God, but He, likewise the angels and the people of knowledge;

²⁹ *Prolegomena*, 11

³⁰ See his *Islam and Secularism*, 61.

³¹ The conception of the nature of God in Islam is derived from revelation. See al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 12-13. Also according to the Ash‘arites, God is one, unique, eternal, an existent Being; He is not a substance, not a body, not an accident, not limited to any direction, and not in any space (see Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Ismāīl, al-‘Ash‘arī, *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyānah* (Haydarabad, 1948), 47; hereinafter mentioned as *Ibānah*. See also, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-Dawlah, 1928), 73

maintains justice; there is no God, but He, the Al-Mighty, the Wise. Truly the *dīn* with God is Islam; and those to whom the Book has been given did not differ until after knowledge came to them, out of envy among themselves; and whoever rejects the signs of God (will find) that God is quick to reckon. And if they argue with you, say: 'I have surrendered myself to God, likewise whoever follows me.' And say to those to whom the Book has been given and to those who have no book, 'Have you surrendered?' If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn away you are responsible only for conveying the message to them, for God is the observer of (His) servants. (*Āl Imrān* (3): 18-20)

The Qur'ān makes clear that not any kind of submission can be accepted as true submission. The true submission and acceptable religion to God is the religion which emanates from the true conception of the unity of God. True submission to God therefore, includes the manner and the form of submission to God, as exemplified and perfected by the last Prophet (pbuh). Thus, the affirmation and verification of *tawhīd* lies in the manner and in the form of submission that is prescribed by the teachings of Islam.

Islam as a result of the process of 'reification'

To further support his stand, Smith states that it was only recently (19th-20th centuries) that Islam had incontestably become the chosen term to signify both a religion and a type of politico-social involvement. He claims that the usage and meaning of the word *Islām* has undergone the process of evolution over the centuries. Accordingly, he concludes that the religion of Islam is no longer in its true, original form but, rather has taken a 'reified' sense.³² This statement is strongly supported by Toshihiko Izutsu:

³² Ibid., 48.

But by far the most important of all the concepts belonging in this class is the concept of *islām* itself, not, of course, in the sense of the historical, objective religious culture known as Islam- Islam as a result of the process of 'reification'...but *islām* in the original sense of the determined self-submission, self-surrendering to the Divine Will, i.e., a decisive step taken by each individual person and existential problem, towards resigning his soul to God.³³

In order to prove his view, Smith has produced a number of arguments, such as *Islām* gets much less attention than *īmān* in the Qur'ān, its use has a ratio of one to five, and the title *Islam* in the works of very early Muslim scholars are considerably less common than today.³⁴ His thesis eventually leads the reader to accept his conviction that Islam as the name of a particular religion is a comparatively new development and that the term really means religious submission in its general sense.

To develop his arguments, Smith found it necessary to prove to the readers that the Qur'ān and the works of the very early Muslims scholars used *īmān* for referring to the religion revealed to the Prophet (pbuh), whereas the term *islām* was used to refer to submission in general terms (individual submission) only. To anyone who reads and understands the Qur'ān, this is an obvious falsification of the Qur'ānic text.

Islām Outnumbers Īmān

He even goes on to use statistics to support his thesis, as he states that the ratio of the term *īmān* to *Islām* in the Qur'ān and in the works of very early Muslim scholars were statistically very significant in comparison to modern Islamic literature. According to this statistics, the ratio of the term *īmān* to *islām* in the Qur'ān is as much as five to one. Therefore, he concludes :

³³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God And Man In The Qur'ān* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Culture and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 199

³⁴ Smith, *Understanding*, 50

...during these centuries, *islām* slightly outnumbers *īmān* in titles, in ratio of three to two. We have already seen that in the Qur'ān the ratio was one to five, in favour of *īmān*. In modern times, this ratio changes to over thirteen to one. That is, *islām* gets much less attention than *īmān* in the Qur'ān, gradually comes to get slightly more attention as Islamic history proceeds, and today is vastly more considered.³⁵

The use of the term *Islām* and *īmān* in the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* of the Prophet and the works of the early Muslim scholars was synonymous and interchangeable and that the term *islām* was clearly mentioned as the name of the religion revealed to the Prophet.³⁶

Conclusion

Smith appears to be critical and straight forward against the conventional Christian and Western secular viewpoints on religion. In refusing to accept the meaning of the word *Islām* as the name of the religion revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and practically limiting it to a vague concept of submission, Smith actually projects his deconstructive insights on the concept of Islam. Smith wishes to bring Islam under the broad umbrella of the unity of religions and religious pluralism. The meaning of *Islām* includes within itself not only the verbal noun meaning, but its understanding as the name and definition of the religion as well. The originality of this idea is more reflected in its tenet that *Islam*, as the name of this religion, did not unfold itself to become other than what it was, and in line with changing circumstances, through the consciousness of its adherents throughout its history. We maintain that Islam as a religion is not merely a set of rules of laws, and neither is it restricted only to rituals, but it covers every sphere of life in which *tawḥīd* serves as the bedrock of submission.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Al-Tirmīdhī, 2: 101; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1: 48; al-Nasāī, 2: 264-266; Ibn Mājah, 1: 24-25; al-Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 1: 36-40.

As a religion, Islam is complete in its fundamental outlook from the very beginning. All the essentials of the religion of Islam, such as the name, the faith and practice, the rituals, the creed and system of belief are revealed in the Qur'ān which is eternally absolute in nature. Accordingly, there is no place for the evolution of major conceptions of belief and *aqīdah* in Islam. These basic concepts do not undergo the process of change which clerics proclaim in other religions.

In addition, we maintain that there is no evolutionary process as far as the understanding of the concept of Islam is concerned. Unlike other religions Islam did not go through the so-called historical process of reification. Islam, since the time it was revealed to the final Prophet (pbuh), was already perfected from the very beginning, requiring no historical explanation and evaluation in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within the process of development. All the essentials of religion, that is, *the name, the faith and practice, the ritual, the creed and system of belief* were conferred by Revelation and exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) throughout his life-time. Islam exerts its own authentic and firm stand, for as the nature of God as understood in Islam, it is fundamentally different from the nature of God understood in all other religions and worldviews. Different religions perceive Truth differently and concepts of Truth may be tangential, even identical. The religion of Islam is both exclusive and inclusive. As far as theological or creedal matters are concerned, Islam is exclusive. On the subject of creed pertaining to the question of God, His nature or attributes, Muslims should not compromise with other religions in either conception or perception, except in a very general *rubūbiyyah* manner. In other words, we cannot dilute the concept of God with the misunderstandings of other religions. As for moral and ethical values, the door is wide open for polite conversation, dialogue and cooperation. In fact, noble ethical principles of interpersonal relationship found in most religious teachings serve as a source of guidance for human relationship. For at the end of the day, the heart of all religious conviction is peace, balance and harmony, not violence and aggression.