

CHRISTIANITY/ ISLAM (ESSAYS ON ESOTERIC ECUMENICISM)

**by Frithjof Schuon (Isa Nur-ud-Din) Published by World Wisdom
Books P. O. Box 2682, Bloomington, Indiana, 47402--2682 U.S.A 1985.
Price \$ 12.00 pp.270.**

Frithjof Schuon (Isa Nur-ud-Din) is a writer who occupies a distinctive place in contemporary thought. His writings manifest a deeper understanding of both the traditional and the modern world. They present a critique of modern philosophy, science and art from the metaphysical/traditional perspective. He completely excels in the field of comparative religion by unveiling the principle of unity behind all manifestation. From his first book 'The Transcendent Unity of Religions' to his later works he has consistently tried to understand the essence of religious phenomena. Each religion has a substance and a form. The former is universal whereas the latter is a product of numerous variables. This single observation permeates his entire works.

'Christianity/Islam' is a book which comprises 'Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism'. It is divided into three parts. Each essay in its unique way touches on certain fundamental aspects of the Tradition. Both Christian and Islamic perspectives shine forth in the light of Truth. The book starts with an enlightening discussion on liturgy. The author categorically commits that a liturgy cannot be invented and the modern languages by dint of profanity cannot replace liturgical languages. Neither the level of liturgy can be debased to the level of the modern man nor the sacred can be lowered to satisfy the demands of profanity. Next, he turns to the question of Evangelicalism and places Luther in the correct perspective. One finds his discussion on protestantism as highly illuminating. 'The Mystery of the Two Natures' of Christ is a wonderful essay on the subject. An intelligent discussion on the relation between the relative and the absolute gives a peep into the heart of the Christian tradition. The first part concludes with a discourse on spiritual values in reference to St. Francis of Assisi. Unlike the moral norms which remain stranded on the horizontal dimension, the spiritual virtues open up the vertical plane which embraces both God and man.

‘Truth and Presence’ is an essay which reveals the basic axioms of Islam and Christianity. The former is wedded to the idea that ‘it is the absolute Truth which saves’ whereas the latter holds on to the axiom that it is the Divine Presence which saves. However, both represent truth and presence in their own right and in a higher gnosis both Islam and Christianity meet.’ The Problem of Moral Divergences’ in traditional morals ‘may stem from outer conditions of life combined with profound differences of temperament; they may also stem from levels of application and differences of perspective. The gap between the Law of Moses and that of Christ offers a particularly clear example of this.’ The author further discusses the alternations in Semitic Monotheism and introduces the vital concepts of ‘holy equilibrium’ and ‘holy disequilibrium’.

There is an enlightening discussion on the Islamic perspective which reveals the quintessence of Islam and establishes the author as a master of the Tradition. “The Idea of The Best in Religions” is beautifully analyzed and the presence of an element of absoluteness constitutes the justification for the existence of a particular religion. ‘Religions are like lamps of colored glass’. However, they all converge at a transcendent point. ‘Faith, Obedience, Inwardness, Equilibrium; such is the entire Semitic monotheistic cycle’. ‘Images of Islam’ is an essay which takes us to the principle behind Shia-Sunni divergence. Both manifest different perspectives which can be understood at a higher level. In ‘Dilemma of Moslem Scholasticism, the author mainly shows the weaknesses of the Ash’arites and presents a critique of their basic dictum; will of God. No serious student of Muslim Scholasticism can afford to ignore the questions raised by the author in this behalf. The essay on ‘Atomism and Creation’ touches a favourable topic of the metaphysicians, philosophers and theologians, It raises one’s level of understanding on the issue dare one can expect from a great writer

Shahzad Qiser

(LIBRARY)