

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGISING IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAM: THEOLOGY OF WILLIAM MONTGOMERY WATT

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I. Introduction :

William Montgomery Watt, an Anglican priest, had been involved with Muslims and studying Islam since 1938. During 1947 to 1979 he was the Head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh. His published works on Islam are numerous and include his illustrious works on Muhammad, entitled **Muhammad at Mecca**¹, **Muhammad at Medina**², and the condensed form of these two in **Muhammad - Prophet and Statesman**³. Watt's works on Islam are from the perspective of a sympathetic historian-cum-sociologist of religion, avoiding for the most part any Christian theological critique of Islam; but doing his Christian theology by being in, and promoting a dialogue with Islam and its followers. His theologising, which evolved over a thirty year period of study of the Islamic sources and personal encounter with Muslims, is seminally contained in a long essay entitled "Thoughts on Muslim - Christian Dialogue"⁴, and in his book titled **Islam and Christianity Today**⁵. The latter larger work can be regarded as an expansion of the former. These two, and also the other works of Watt, emerged from his responding to the current challenge of religious pluralism to which neither the Christian theologians involved in serious academic activity nor the priests living and promoting relevant religious life can be inattentive.

"The essential factor at the present time which is challenging Muslims and Christians (and also, of course, adherents of other creeds) to dialogue", Watt maintained, "is the increasing extent to which we are all living in a condition of 'inter-religion' or religious pluralism"⁶. He argued that within this new context of religious pluralism, inspired primarily by "curiosity", human beings "sooner or later" are going to "ask religious questions"⁷. In addition to such informal inquiries Watt predicted "more formal occasions where religion has to be discussed", and these discussions, he believed, initially will "tend to be about external observances such as public worship and fasting"⁸, but eventually will lead to deeper and fundamental questions about religious truth not unintegrated with essence of life lived in the community.

Watt justified his prediction when he discussed important events of 1976 in which he himself had participated: the Christian-Muslim dialogue held in Tripoli, Libya, in February 76; and the International Congress on Seerat, held in Pakistan in March 76. In retrospect Watt considered both these dialogue-events to be of much significance and "worth reflecting upon", particularly for Christian-Muslim relations in the contemporary world. These two conferences, briefly discussed below, were the result of Muslim initiatives in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

II. Muslim Initiatives in Christian - Muslim Dialogue:

Tripoli conference on Christians and Muslims was initiated and financed by the Libyan Government, the arrangements being undertaken by both the Libyan Government and the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Cristians (now known as Pontifical Institute for Interreligious Dialogue). Both Christians and Muslims had a dozen experts on each side with about five hundred observers from over fifty different countries. According to Watt the discussions at this Seminar "were on the whole eirenic, and the majority of those present showed a desire for more mutual understanding, though there were dissidents in both camps"⁹. About the value of this meeting Watt wrote:

The significance of this Seminar was that the initiative came chiefly from the Muslims. It was an expression of their growing self-confidence as they find themselves playing an increasingly important role in world politics. The Christians were in a sense on the defensive. Colonel Kadhafi of Libya personally took part in one of the sessions and in effect asked the Christians why they did not accept the Islamic teaching. Because of the public and official character of this Seminar and because it was widely reported in various countries, it makes a trend to which the main line of Christian theology must sooner or later pay attention¹⁰.

An authentic dialogue evolves from "strength" and not from "weakness". At Tripoli the Muslims were "self-confident". It is this same character of Muslim confidence, for Watt made the Pakistan conference also very significant.

The International Congress on Seerat, Watt wrote, "was an occasion of a very different type" and was "arranged by the Pakistan Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Hamdard National Foundation of Pakistan"¹¹. Participants at the Pakistan symposium "were predominantly Muslims"¹². A few Christians were also present. The primary aim of the conference was "to give Muslims an opportunity to consider the relevance of Islam in the modern world and to offer one another mutual support and spiritual uplift"¹³. For Watt the Pakistan conference "indicated that many Muslims were ready to participate"¹⁴ in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The confident willingness of Muslims on these two occasions to enter into a dialogical relationship with Christians, according to Watt, should elicit from the latter some kind of an undefensive, open response towards Islam and its followers. But the very nature of religion - as social defence, whether in Islamic or Christian forms (or for that matter in any other form), Watt realised, makes such response a gigantic task. Without lowering of defenses, Watt always maintained, a relevant Christian theologising and an authentic Christian life style cannot be developed. For him the whole purpose of inter-religious dialogue, as I have attempted to argue in this paper, is a lowering of the in built defenses between or/and over against the different religions, but in this case Islam and Christianity.

III. Religion as Social Defence:

Watt's understanding of the religious phenomenon is essentially that of a sociologist. In his book entitled **What is Islam?**¹⁵, he stated that his view of religion "is close to that of Durkheim"¹⁶. Elsewhere he expressed his indebtedness to other sociologists of religion such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann¹⁷. He wrote:

Religion is held to have an important function in the life of society; it may be said to enable a society to become aware of itself and of its own deepest nature. Religion does this by providing a basic plan into which are integrated all the activities of the society, economic, social, intellectual¹⁸.

This view, obviously, does not promote a single vision of religion. It has within itself room for many religions. Therefore, religions, in the plural, are sociologically valid and necessary for continuing of human life.

For Watt, religion is primarily a social defence against disintegration of humanity. Hence, it is, perhaps, the most important dimension of human life. For this reason Watt vehemently defends religion from scientism that tends to deny the value of religion and religious value¹⁹. In fact, at least to some extent, Watt's urgency for Christian-Muslim dialogue also seems to depend on this factor, namely, defending religious truth against scientism. This is actually confirmed in an autobiographical note where we read:

Before I was involved in the dialogue with Islam I had also been personally involved in the dialogue with scientism, which was widely followed at that time. It soon became clear to me that I could not defend my own beliefs against scientism without also defending Islam²⁰.

Watt, therefore, operated primarily from a sociological perspective. For him "reality" itself has a social dimension and has a symbolic nature. In other words religion is a social symbolization of reality. He wrote:

Human life is a response to the reality around and within us, yet not immediately to the reality as it is in itself but to the reality as we have symbolized it; and this symbolization comes to us from our society and is supported by it²¹.

Watt, like any other sociologist, will not dispute with the "truth claim" of any religion. Sociologists of religion are not primarily concerned about the theological validity of any religion. This is because, as we have seen above, in religion we do not deal with "the reality" in itself but with "the reality" as it is symbolized by any particular society.

Further, Watt maintained, it is difficult for any religious community "to tolerate within its territory any alternative symbolization of reality, since this threatens the basis of its whole way of life"²². It is precisely because of this, he believes, that religions go on to erect "defences". Therefore, exclusivism is also a socio-religious phenomenon. It is an aspect of religious life from which arises "what are traditionally known as polemics and apologetics"²³.

According to Watt each of the great religions is developed, and therefore builds its defences, in the particular cultural sphere where it spread first and "in which there has been a symbiosis of its symbolization with pre-existing categories of thought"²⁴. It is this, Watt believed that makes communication between religions very difficult. Islam and Christianity have many technical terms in common, such as 'religion', 'revelation', 'prophet'²⁵. But the symbiosis of symbolization of Islam and Christianity took place in entirely different historical periods and cultural spheres. And therefore both religions are in that sense different, with a variety of inbuilt social defences. For Watt a genuine meeting of these two religions, or for that matter any two, will be possible not by becoming defensive but by lowering the defences.

IV. Inter-religious Dialogue as Lowering of Social Defences:

Watt argued that although religions function in a socially defensive manner, they need not always remain on the defensive, and therefore exclusive. He also maintained that for "a religion to rely on 'defences' is in part a sign of weakness"²⁶. He believes that it is possible for religions to lower their defences without losing their unique characteristics. The challenge for world religions today, Watt believed, is precisely to lower these defences which is achieved through what he commends as the way of inter-religious dialogue.²⁷

Earlier we noted that Watt considered the events of 1976 which we discussed above to be a clear sign of Muslims willingness to enter into a dialogue with Christians. Moreover, we saw that this Muslim willingness to establish contact with Christians evolves from a sense of "confidence" which is the

opposite of being defensive. If this is true, and if deliberate lowering of defences can be considered as dialogue, then, the duty of Christians is to respond to the invitation of Muslims to enter into a dialogical relationship.

But this invitation, for Watt, is not an amalgamation of faiths. It is even different to the ecumenical concern of the Christian Churches where they are looking for some kind of unity. Watt denied any possibility of "assimilation or subsumation, that is, by claiming that the other religions are saying essentially the same thing as one's own".²⁸ Watt recognised that Islam takes this attitude to some degree.²⁹

For Watt the proper Christian response to the Muslim invitation for dialogue is lowering the Christian defences against Islam. "Dialogue between followers of different religions", Watt affirmed, "implies a more or less deliberate lowering of 'defences'".³⁰ Dialogue demands that we abandon our defensive attitude and "adopt an attitude of openness".³¹ For this a Christian will need to develop a "better understanding" of Christian faith and "a fuller positive appreciation" of Islam.³² Further, Watt argued that dialogue implies a "mutual recognition" between Christians and Muslims that they are "fellow-climbers of the cloud-covered mountain on whose summit in the mists God dwells unseen".³³

Watt also had an interesting discussion on the relationship between dialogue and mission. Being aware of the ever increasing polarization within the Christian community between the "evangelicals" who zealously promote "evangelizing" the Muslims and the "ecumenicals" who enthusiastically advocate "dialogue" with Muslims, Watt argued that dialogue should not be contrasted with evangelizing or witness. On the other hand he affirmed that Christians involved in dialogue with people of living faiths, including Muslims, should not use the platform of dialogue for the purpose of proselytizing.³⁴ No doubt he would say the same to all dialogue partners. At the same time Watt was aware that those involved in dialogue will be able to communicate the truth and validity of their own faith in a way that the persons of another faith can positively appreciate. In that sense dialogue can become an effective witness to one's own faith.³⁵ This will, therefore, imply that dialogue has no room for proselytization, but there is space in dialogue to convince a partner of another faith and to be convinced. This may lead, in some cases, to the change of religious allegiance of any partner engaged in inter-religious dialogue. However, it is clear in the writings of Watt that the primary purpose of dialogue is not to encourage the change of the religious allegiance in any of the partners. That can only remain as a side effect of dialogue but never the main goal.³⁶

Watt also recognises that there are many forms of dialogue. But what is important in dialogue, for him, is not so much the form but the "openness" with which one encounters the other religion. Hence he wrote:

Dialogue occurs in many forms. It may be officially organised as in the case of the Tripoli Seminar. The English Christian who begins to learn about Islam from his Pakistani workmate is involved in informal dialogue. Even the Christian scholar who immerses himself in Islam through books may be said to be engaging in dialogue. Wherever and however the other religion is present and is encountered with openness, there dialogue is taking place.³⁷

Watt's view on Christian-Muslim dialogue, therefore, can be summarised in the following way. First, the global context of religious pluralism encourages and demands inter-religious dialogue, which, of course includes Christian-Muslim dialogue. In this regard he attached importance to those Muslim initiatives in dialogue in which he has participated. Second, the aim of such dialogue is a deliberate lowering of the "defence", which means creating a sense of openness. Third, Dialogue should not be contrasted with witness but with proselytization. Witness and evangelization should be also contrasted with proselytization. Fourth, a change of religious allegiance should not be forced upon anyone but people should have the freedom to change, if they find it necessary. Fifth, dialogue occurs in many forms. Sixth, as we would see in the following section, Watt highlighted three phases of dialogue. They are: (1) "when members of each religion recognize the members of the other as fellow-believers in God"; (2) "is a necessary consequence of the first and consists in the revision and reassessment by each religion of its doctrines to bring them into accord with the implications of its acceptance of the other religion as belief in God"; (3) "is the renewal of vision". This last, Watt believed, may sometimes precede the earlier points, but he warned that we cannot intellectualise the vision.

V. Lowering Christian and Islamic Defences:

Watt's sociological understanding of religion, that is religion as a social phenomenon, his social construction of reality, and emphasis on the symbol of reality rather than the reality itself paved the way for him to develop a pluralistic understanding of religious reality. Hence, as we have noted earlier, he considered a Christian not as a secluded solitary pilgrim but as a fellow-climber of the cloud-covered mountain on whose summit in the mists God dwells unseen. Both Christian and Muslim with their religious faiths are moving towards God, the ultimate goal of human life. In that journey together, since Christianity and Islam help them respectively, Watt will have no problem in accepting the validity of these two religions.

However, Watt was aware of the historical realities. The quarrels and conflicts between the religions of Christianity and Islam, cannot be denied. He was also aware of the conflicting truth claims and contradictions, both real and apparent, between Christianity and Islam. Watt interpreted these, as noted earlier, as evidence of both religions building up their own defences against the other.

For Watt these conflicting truth claims are often more apparent than real. For example, Watt claimed that the Qur'anic criticisms of Christianity are only apparent criticisms: in that the Christianity criticised in the Qur'an is only the "Christian heresies which orthodox Christians would themselves criticise".³⁸ In other words, for Watt the conflicting truth claims often do not really conflict. And as for him, he was committed to reducing these apparent contradictions. When a religious faith that is not one's own, Watt firmly believed, is encountered with "openness", then inter-religious dialogue is taking place. When there is "openness" there is also a reduction of conflicts and lowering of defences. When this happens among Christians and Muslims, Watt believes, then both these religious communities will "come to accept one another as fellow-servants of God".³⁹

In the context of conflicting truth claims, both real and apparent, Watt also visualised the need for reassessment of Christianity and Islam by their respective adherents. This would be for Watt the second phase of inter-religious dialogue, the first being the followers of different religions accepting one another as legitimate fellow pilgrims. The "revision and reassessment by each religion of some of its doctrines to bring them into accord with the implications of its acceptance of the religion as belief in God", Watt argued, "is a necessary consequence of the first".⁴⁰ He believed that such revision and reassessment was not only relevant but also possible. Hence he went on to spend quite a considerable amount of his energy in highlighting areas where such is possible, and then himself did it. Later we will examine two examples of such reassessment that may lead to reducing the conflicts and apparent contradictions between Christianity and Islam.

Lowering Christian and Islamic defences against one another will not lead Christians and Muslims to accept the same set of doctrinal formulations. Watt considered such an expectation to be unrealistic. Further, he maintained, that the aim of dialogue is not moving towards the same set of doctrinal formulations. "Fuller mutual recognition", Watt believed, "is thus the further aim of dialogue, and not complete unification".⁴¹

For Watt, as for many who advocate a dialogical relationship with people of other faiths, there is an aspect in this venture that eludes all conceptualis-

ing and intellectualising which he as a Christian would attribute to the working of the Holy Spirit. For Watt this is the final phase of inter-religious dialogue which may sometime precede the second, namely, the phase of "revision and reassessment". The final phase is marked "by the renewal of vision" which "takes the symbolism of his religion and somehow remoulds it so to incorporate the insights gained from dialogue".⁴² This, he believed, may lead to some sort of a revival movement. Here Watt seems to be suggesting, like Hasan Askari, the movement from multi-religious awareness to inter-religious commitment.⁴³ But, as we have indicated, that is an area which Watt found impossible adequately to articulate. Moreover he may have argued, that in the present movement of inter-religious dialogue we are not yet ready for that until we do sufficient revision and reassessment.

VI. Reassessment Required of Christian:

The fact that the present set of Christian and Muslim doctrinal formulations without any alterations, cannot lead to any kind of pluralistic model of thinking is beyond dispute. The problem is, most such doctrinal formulations, whether they are Christian or Muslim, were evolved, to a large extent, in the separate worlds of Christianity and Islam and are mutually exclusive. But now the whole world, as Watt saw, "has been culturally unified at the material level by the modern science and technology".⁴⁴ This demands re-working of our old formulations in such a way to co-habit in the world that is being unified by science and technology.

Therefore, Watt argued, if Christians were to proceed into dialogue with Muslims authentically, then, after acknowledging the Christian malpractices of past and present, "there are some ideas about Islam current among Christians, and even some popular forms of Christian belief, which need to be carefully scrutinized and revised."⁴⁵ Watt has highlighted several such areas that require reassessment by Christians. Here it will suffice to discuss one such major area, namely, the place of Islam in the purpose of God. What Watt said here becomes doubly important if we look at this question in the historical perspective. In the dominant exclusivistic Christian thinking of the past and present, the basis of "only Christ" excluded, without any doubt, Islam from the purpose of God. But, Watt does not do that.

Watt's Christian theology begins with a presupposition "that the course of biological and cultural (or historical) evolution must somehow or other express the purpose of God".⁴⁶ Then as a historian he argued "that the success of Islam was not due to conversions by force of arms, but rather to social pressures and perhaps a certain intellectual attraction".⁴⁷ Further, reflecting on "history of Christianity in the Middle East in the century before Muhammad", Watt maintained, "that Christianity in this region had failed to deal with

the problem of cross-cultural communications".⁴⁸ About the failure of Christianity Watt wrote:

The ecumenical Christian councils, in working out Trinitarian and Christological doctrines reached formulations which satisfied Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking Christians, but which seemed mistaken to those who spoke Syriac or Coptic (or, later, Armenian). In the doctrine of the Trinity the Latin words for the One and the Three, *substantia* and *persona*, were accepted as the equivalents of the Greek words *ousia* and *hypostasis*, although they do not correspond linguistically; indeed *hypostasis* ought to correspond to *substantia*. Each of these pairs of words, however, was found satisfactory within the context of Latin and Greek categories of thought respectively. Especially in matters of Christology, however, there was no acceptance of of Syriac and Coptic formulations as equivalent to those in Greek and Latin. Instead the Christians who spoke Syriac and Coptic were declared heretics and excluded from the great Church.⁴⁹

After discussing the breaking down of dialogue among the Christians of Middle East, Watt affirmed that it "is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the success of Islam in the original Christian heartlands is somehow due to weaknesses and failures within the Christian Church".⁵⁰ He also believed that the concepts behind "most Islamic teaching were more congenial to many Christians in Islamic lands than the Greek categories of Christian Orthodoxy".⁵¹ The success of Islam in the Middle East when Christianity failed led Watt to believe that the former has a place in the purpose of God.

If Watt's assumption, namely, "the course of biological and cultural (or historical) evolution must somehow or other express the purpose of God", is valid, then, perhaps his conclusion is also valid. Watt's reassessment of Islam in the purpose of God is based, as we have noted above, not primarily on an abstract theological reassessment. But he has based his argument purely on historiography. Here, Watt's basic assumption may appear to contradict the central symbol of Christianity, namely, the cross, which is often considered to be the opposite of success, whereas, Watt's appreciation of Islam is on the basis of its success in Middle East where Christianity failed. On the other hand, if we apply the notion of incarnation, the basic Christian theological concept, which means human history is the arena where God works, to what Watt has argued for, then it is possible to conclude that Watt's reassessment is perfectly in line with the Christian theological tradition. This is because the Christian doctrine of incarnation suggests that God not only acted in the human history but continues to act in the same.

If What Watt has said about the place of Islam in God's purpose is accepted by Christians then this would demand reassessment of many other mat-

ters, including the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines. As for Watt, the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines which Christians hold at present, need, not just reassessment, "but a complete reformulation".⁵² Here his suggestions point to the complexities connected with Christian-Muslim relation in contemporary times. For there can be no authentic Christian Muslim relationship without a serious grappling with the theological issues that in the past have alienated the two communities from one another.

VII. Revision Expected of Muslims

Relationships are not one way traffic. They demand reciprocity. This makes Watt suggest certain areas where he thinks the Muslims must make reassessments and revision. These revisions "which Muslims have to make", Watt argued, "are in some ways more fundamental than those which Christians have to make".⁵³ This is because of the fact that Christianity as a historical movement preceded Islam, and further these revisions which Watt suggested are "linked with questions about the interpretations of the Qur'an".⁵⁴ Watt, rightly, was aware that these are primarily the duty of the Muslims. It is with such sensitivity he offers his various suggestions that include a rethinking of the crucifixion of Jesus. It is the latter, according to S. H. Nasr, that is the sticking point between the Christians and Muslims. All else, Nasr claims, can be reinterpreted.⁵⁵

Muslims, generally, do not accept the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus. And for Watt, like Nasr, the crucifixion of Jesus is the main difference between Islam and Christianity. "The common Muslim belief that Jesus did not die on the cross", Watt wrote, "contradicts doctrines that are at the heart of Christianity".⁵⁶

On the other hand, Watt affirmed that the modern historiography has proved, beyond doubt, the crucifixion of Jesus. For him this is a fact "as the fact that Muhammad proclaimed the religion of Islam in Mecca about the year 610.⁵⁷ Watt's discussion in this regard is centred around the *Sura* 4: 157 — 159. Here though the crucifixion of Jesus "appears to be denied by the Qur'an", yet, Watt argued that it "is not as decisive as has commonly been thought by Muslims".⁵⁸

Watt, like many other Christians, has pointed here that *Sura* 4: 157 — 159 "asserts that the Jews 'did not kill him, did not crucify him'".⁵⁹ This assertion, Watt argued, is true in the sense that it was not the Jews who did it but the Romans, though following orders from the Jewish authorities,⁶⁰ who crucified and killed Jesus. Further, the Qur'anic passage cited above is true in the sense that the Jewish claim, namely, "that they had been victorious over Jesus and his followers, is completely false".⁶¹ This Watt believed, was proved

by the history of the early Christians. In addition, there is the phrase *Shub-biha la-lum*. The meaning of this is, "it was made to appear to them". Watt maintained that this phrase "can be interpreted in many different ways, not all of them contrary to Christian teaching".⁶²

Watt recognised that there is some hope concerning the way Muslims understand the crucifixion. He believed that the "Muslim are coming to realize that there is a problem here with which they will have to grapple sooner or later",⁶³ while taking encouragement in the attempts made by Mahmoud Ayoub, a contemporary Lebanese Muslim.⁶⁴ Perhaps, it is the hope, that emerges from the actual and potential reassessment of Christians, and the revision of the Islamic doctrines and reinterpretation of the Qur'an by the Muslims, which made Watt conceive the possibility of moving towards a global sacral history.

VIII. Towards a Global Sacral History:

Earlier, when discussing Watt's affirmation that Islam is part of God's purpose, we said that Watt assumed that the course of biological and cultural (or historical) evolution must somehow or other express the purpose of God. This assumption, Watt may have argued, is both Biblical and Qur'anic. For, he believed, "the Bible and the Qur'an clearly express the view that God controls the events of History".⁶⁵ In that sense God is the Lord of the history.

Watt distinguished "history" from "historiography". The latter for him is the description "of the course of events",⁶⁶ while the former is "events relevant to human meanings".⁶⁷ Watt called the history found in the Bible and the Qur'an "sacral history", to differentiate it "from most of the history written today, which is secular".⁶⁸ Moving now into his sociological understanding of reality, Watt claimed, that sacral histories of each community are derived from the contemplation of each community about the future which includes a vision in which the particular community expands itself to include the whole human race.⁶⁹ However, Watt recognised that the sacral histories of different communities in their present forms may not become "the sacral history of all humanity". But, "the major part of each", he believed, "would be incorporated into a global sacral history".⁷⁰

Therefore, Watt argued, in a global sacral history, the important contributions made by each major religion will be considered from their "own distinctive categories of thought".⁷¹ 'Thus', Watt wrote, "while Jews, Christians and Muslims regard monotheism as an appropriate account of the ultimate conditions of human existence or of ultimate reality, Buddhists would not do so".⁷² Watt was certain that "an apparent contradiction does not necessarily mark a real contradiction".⁷³ Yet, in the present context, where so much in the world religions appears contradictory to each other, Watt admitted, it is not an easy task "to find terms in which to express a global sacral history".⁷⁴

Watt does not have a definite plan about global sacral history. But he is convinced that in the future it "is unlikely that the great religions will continue indefinitely to follow parallel axes".⁷⁵ Further, he does not doubt the important contributions made by the different world religions. Hence, he is convinced about the validity of the world religions and the importance to consider them in moving towards a global sacral history. Moreover, Watt maintained, rightly, that "until the future condition of world religion is known, there can be no definitive global sacral history".⁷⁶

IX. Conclusion:

From the preceding paragraphs we may conclude that Watt's Christian theology is marked by more than a mere "Christian theological tolerance of Islam". He visualised a co-habitation of Islam and Christianity sharing a single global sacral history by a lowering of the present defenses built up by the Muslim and Christian communities through a process of a re-defining of the respective theologies.

For Watt religions, in plural, is a social phenomenon not only valid but also necessary for the well being of the society: for it is through religions the different communities are sustained in finding ultimate meaning. In this sense, as discussed earlier, religions are social defences. By this Watt is able to tolerate the exclusivistic claims of religions that have inbuilt defence systems. However, as we saw above, in the context of religious pluralism and in a world that is being made a single world by science and technology, world religions must lower their defences. It is this lowering of defences Watt calls inter-religious dialogue. Watt rightly believed that no further theologising in the religiously plural world is possible without a lowering of these defences.

Watt's sociological consideration of world religions may appear to be a reductionist approach, and may even suggest that he, as we noted earlier, is contradicting basic Christian theological presuppositions. But a closer examination reveals that Watt, in his reflection of the world religions, is confirming the doctrine of incarnation, the divine manifesting in the human. Watt's theology of world religions is based on the presupposition that history, that is the human sphere, is the arena where God acts. By this the history of religions is, at least in some sense, an incarnation, the manifestations of the divine. It is by looking at, and interpreting the experience of different communities, which are all religious, that we do adequate theologising. Therefore task of Christian theologians in the present multi-religious society is, following Watt, one of creative hermeneutics of the present human and historical experience.

Notes :

1. Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1953.
2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
3. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
4. *Hamdard Islamicus*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1977), pp. 1 — 52.
5. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
6. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", p. 2.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 4f.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
15. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
17. Cf. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, p. 7f.
18. Watt, *What is Islam?*, p. 4.
19. Cf. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, pp. 7 — 43.
20. *Ibid.*, p, xiii.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", p. 7.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 7f.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
25. *Ibid.*

26. Ibid.
27. Cf. *ibid.*
28. Ibid.
29. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 8.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Ibid.
32. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, p. 146.
33. Ibid.
34. Cf. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim - Christian Dialogue", p. 9
35. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 9f.
36. Cf. *ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
38. Cf. Watt, "The Christianity Criticized in the Qur'an", *The Muslim World*, Vol. LVII, No. 3, (July 1967), pp. 197 — 201.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
40. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim - Christian Dialogue", p. 11.
41. Ibid.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
43. Cf. Hasan Askari, "Within and Beyond the Experience of Religious Diversity", *The Experience of Religious Diversity*, edited by [Hick and Askari (England: Gower Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 191 — 218.
44. Watt, *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), p. 114.
45. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim - Christian Dialogue". p. 52.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
47. *Ibid.*,
48. Ibid.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

50. Ibid., p. 20.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid, p. 21.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Cf. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (London / Boston / Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 210.
56. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim - Christian Dialogue", p. 25.
57. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, p. 144.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p. 144f.
64. Cf. *ibid.*
65. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, p. 105
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 113f.
70. Ibid., p. 113.
71. Ibid., p. 114.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., p. 115.
76. Ibid.