

Muslim Intellectual Engagement with Christianity in the 20th Century: The Approaches of Ahmed Deedat and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi

التفاعل الفكري الإسلامي مع المسيحية في القرن العشرين: نهج أحمد ديدات وإسماعيل راجي الفاروقي

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Abstract

This study examines the 20th-century Muslim intellectual engagement with Christianity through the contrasting approaches of Ahmed Deedat and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, two influential scholars who shaped Muslim responses to Christian theology and missionary activities. Deedat, a South African Muslim of Indian descent, adopted a polemical style, using public debates to highlight contradictions in the Bible while defending the Qur'an's truth. His confrontational approach empowered Muslims by reinforcing the intellectual superiority of Islamic theology at a popular level. Conversely, al-Faruqi, a Palestinian-American academic, pursued a scholarly and dialogical method, emphasizing interfaith understanding, historical analysis, and mutual respect between Islam and Christianity. His work within academic discourse provided a systematic framework for Christian-Muslim relations, focusing on shared theological and ethical grounds. Both scholars, despite their methodological differences, strengthened Muslim confidence in their faith's intellectual and spiritual foundations, contributing significantly to comparative religion. Deedat's public debates and al-Faruqi's academic writings offered distinct paradigms—apologetic confrontation and scholarly dialogue—that continue to influence contemporary interfaith scholarship. This paper argues that their combined efforts enriched Muslim-Christian discourse, addressing challenges posed by colonial encounters and missionary activities. By analyzing their contributions, the study underscores the importance of diverse approaches in fostering meaningful interfaith dialogue and recommends that modern Muslim scholars adapt these strategies to address contemporary issues like secularism and pluralism.

Keywords: Comparative Religion, Islamic Theology, Christianity, Interfaith Dialogue, Ahmed Deedat, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi

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Introduction

The 20th century witnessed a revival of Muslim intellectual responses to Christianity, shaped by colonial encounters, missionary activities, and interfaith dialogue. Among the most influential figures were Ahmed Deedat and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, who represented distinct yet complementary approaches. While Deedat adopted a confrontational and apologetic method aimed at defending Islam on a popular level, al-Faruqi advanced a systematic and comparative framework for Christian-Muslim relations within academic discourse.

Ahmed Deedat: A pioneer of Muslim-Christian dialogue in the 20th Century:

Sheikh Ahmed Deedat stands among the most distinguished intellectual and religious personalities of the twentieth century. Were the question raised as to who stands as the most influential and eminent intellectual of the twentieth century, nearly eighty percent would affirm the name of Sheikh Ahmed Deedat. Sheikh Ahmed Deedat grew up in the midst of extreme poverty, nurtured within a humble and underprivileged family background. His esteemed father earned his livelihood as a tailor by profession. Sheikh Ahmed Deedat, a South African Muslim scholar of Indian descent, was a renowned author and distinguished orator.¹ Sheikh Ahmed Deedat's work and lectures assumed a distinctive significance within the broader context of Christian-Muslim intellectual engagement, offering critical insights that positioned him uniquely in interfaith discourse.

He dedicated his scholarly career to the field of comparative religion, positioning his work as a bridge between Islamic thought and interfaith engagement, with a strong emphasis on the propagation of Islam. Drawing on his eloquence and intellectual depth, he captivated audiences by articulating informed perspectives on both Islam and Christianity, thereby enriching the discourse of interfaith understanding. Within the scholarly landscape, he is recognized for his distinctive role in advancing the propagation of Islam while simultaneously contributing to the development of interfaith dialogue as a significant field of engagement. With proficiency in more than twenty languages, Sheikh Ahmed Deedat harnessed his eloquence and rhetorical mastery to communicate Islamic perspectives persuasively, thereby enhancing interfaith dialogue and reaching audiences across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

An Overview of Christianity:

In the contemporary times, Christianity is widely recognized as a global religion distinguished by its prominent role in political supremacy and economic influence. The adherents of this faith command considerable significance, both for their vast numerical presence and for their political and economic influence. Christianity has exerted far-reaching influence throughout history and even in the modern era, continues to be a subject of profound relevance and consideration.²

Being the world's largest religion in terms of population, Christianity enjoys a global presence with adherents found across virtually every region of the world. Christianity, much like Judaism, constitutes a principal branch of the broader Abrahamic tradition. In its formative epochs, Christianity emerged as an extension of Judaism, initially perceived not as a separate faith but as a continuation within the Judaic tradition. Hence, Christianity retains a profoundly intrinsic bond with Judaism, reflecting deep historical, theological and cultural interconnections. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of Christianity necessitates a profound acquaintance with the historical background of Judaism.

¹ Dziejewski, Dariusz (8 August 2015). "Remembering the life of Sheikh Ahmed Deedat". Al Jazeera. Retrieved 15 August 2015.

² Deedat, Ahmad, Yahudiyat, Esaiyat aur Islam, trans. Misbah Akram (2012), 129.

A study of Jewish history reveals that the Jews, though entrusted for a time with sovereignty over the land of Palestine, were ultimately obstructed by their deviations and transgressions from effectively administering the responsibilities of statecraft. For their divine guidance, Allah dispatched a succession of prophets among them, yet the Jews, in their obstinacy, disregarded and dismissed the exhortations of those messengers. Their attitude towards the prophets remained shameful. The Jews confined certain prophets in chains, inflicting upon them both mental and physical torment, some were mercilessly stoned to death, while others were brutally sawn apart. The Jews had sunk so profoundly into misguidance that they became ensnared in the shackles of ignorance and superstition.³

Distortion of Jewish scholars:

Prior to the advent of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), the Jewish rabbis and jurists had increasingly immersed themselves in superfluous theological disputes, indulging in matters of little genuine spiritual or doctrinal significance. The Jewish scholars, driven by their own inclinations, introduced distortions and interpolations into the faith, thereby stripping the religion of Musa (peace be upon him) of its pristine essence and leaving it bereft of its original purity.⁴

Political conditions prevailing at the time of emergence of Christianity:

The rise of Christianity took place against the backdrop of the dispersion of the Jewish people. By this time, their communities had been firmly established across the mediterranean region, with a notable expansion of their population throughout various regions of the Middle East. At that time, Palestine was governed by the Aryan rulers who operated under the dominion of the Roman Empire. Jerusalem functioned as a subordinate province under the Roman administration, historically referred to as Judea. Moreover, the region was administered by a governor directly appointed by the Roman Empire.

During this period, society had plunged into such a state of decline that prospects of reform appeared utterly bleak. An era of subjugation prevailed, wherein a narrow elite monopolized the sources of power and strength, reducing the vast majority of God's creation to a state of helplessness and deprivation. Humanity was being crushed under the millstone of oppression and tyranny and there was no one to deliver mankind from these sufferings. The prevailing material conditions bore testimony to the grim reality that the Jewish people would never again behold the light of freedom, nor could they aspire to liberation from the relentless tyranny and despotism of the Roman dominion. Amidst such conditions, it was but natural that the Jews fastened their hopes upon the future, ever anticipating the advent of a divinely sent redeemer who would deliver them from their plight. Regarding their political subjugation as a mere transient episode, they firmly held the conviction that the hour was approaching when the oppressive rulers would be swept away, and the lord would once more endow the Children of Israel with the boon of liberty, elevating them to an enduring, universal sovereignty and dominion.

These ideas were also the common theme of those books which were attributed to Prophet Abraham, Prophet Musa and Prophet Daniel (peace be upon them all). The writings of that period had acquainted the Jews with the conception of a Messianic redeemer and the vision of a celestial kingdom and precisely in that epoch and under such conditions, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) was miraculously born of Maryam (peace be upon her) without a father.⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 130.

⁵ Ibid, 131.

Biography of Hazrat Isa in the light of Quran and Bible:

Names and Titles:

His name was Yeshua, rendered as Jesus in Hebrew and as Isa in Arabic which over time, came to be known in the English tradition as “Christ”. The name carries the connotations of “the one who delivers salvation” and “the blessed one”. Another name attributed to Isa (peace be upon him) is “the Messiah” a title imbued with profound spiritual and theological significance.⁶ In short, your personal name was Yashua or Jesus, known in Arabic as “Isa”. Christ was your nickname. He was honored with the title of Al-Nasiri, while his epithet Ibn Maryam (Son of Mary) reflected his unique birth and served as a distinguished mark of his identity.

The Holy Qur’an provides historical attestations concerning the life of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) and these divine records stand as the most authentic and indisputable source of truth. For a deeper exploration, one must turn to the foundational sources of Christianity, among which the Four Canonical Gospels and the Apocrypha hold a central place.

The Four Gospels and the Apocrypha:

Among the Four Canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke are included as foundational narratives of the New Testament tradition. The first three Gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke) remain free from theological embellishments, whereas the Gospels of John introduces interpretative elements, wherein the concept of Prophet Isa as the “Son of God” emerges for the first time. Furthermore, the Apocrypha encompasses a body of literature that is considerably more elaborate and extensive than these Gospels.

Prophet Isa (Peace Be Upon Him) in the light of the Qur’an:

The Holy Qur’an reveals that the birth of Isa (peace be upon him) was miraculous. His Mother, Maryam (may Allah be pleased with her), had been dedicated to the service of God by her own mother. After her birth, she was placed under the guardianship of Prophet Zakariya (peace be upon him). Maryam lived in one of the arch of the Temple (Bait al-Maqdis), where she devoted herself to worship and spiritual devotion.

Thus, the Qur’an narrates in Surah Al-Imran:

وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ أَنَّى لَكِ هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ⁷

“Thus, Zakariya (peace be upon him) took charge of her care. Whenever he entered her chamber, he found her provided with sustenance. Astonished, he asked: O Maryam! from where does this provision come to you? She answered: It is from Allah; surely Allah bestows sustenance without limit upon whom He wills.”

This verse below highlights that Maryam (peace be upon her) was endowed with an exalted and distinguished position, and she was made aware of this honor through divine insight granted from the unseen.

The Holy Qur’an, in Surah Al-Imran, mentions this:

“And recall when the angels said: O Maryam! Indeed, Allah has chosen you, granted you purity, and elevated you above all the women of creation. O

⁶ Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, Mufradat al-Qur’an, trans. Shaykh al-Hadith Molana Muhammad Abduh, ed. Shaykh Shams al-Haq (June 1987).

⁷ Al-Imran, 3:37.

Maryam! Remain devoted to your Lord, fall in prostration, and bow in worship along with those who bow down."⁸

The Similarity between the Birth of Prophet Isa (A.S) and Prophet Adam (A.S):

This is what the Allah has proclaimed:

*"Surely, in the sight of Allah, the case of Isa is like that of Adam. He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be" and he came into existence."*⁹

Refutation of the Doctrine of the Cross:

It is stated in the Noble Qur'an by Allah:

*"When Allah said: O Isa! I will take you back in a state of peace, and raise you up to Myself, and I will purify you from those who disbelieved (and their harm)."*¹⁰

The Heavenly Ascension of Isa (A.S) and his Second Coming before the Final Hour:

Allah, the Exalted, says:

*"But Allah Blessed and Exalted, took him up to Himself, and Allah is Ever-Powerful, Ever-Wise. And there is not one from the People of the Scripture except that, before his death, he will certainly believe in Isa, and on the day of Judgment he shall be a witness against them."*¹¹

Quranic Rebuttal of the Trinity:

Allah, the Exalted, says:

*"O People of the Scripture! Do not go to extremes in your religion, nor utter anything about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Isa (Jesus) the Son of Maryam, was nothing more than a Messenger of Allah, His Word which He cast upon Maryam, and a spirit from Him. Therefore, believe in Allah and His Messengers, and do not say "Trinity." Desist it will be better for you. Verily, Allah is One God, far exalted above having any son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, and Allah alone is Sufficient as Guardian over all things. The Messiah will never disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor will the angels who are near to Him. And those who disdain His worship and act arrogantly, Allah will gather them all together before Him."*¹²

The Life of Isa in the Light of the Bible and Christian Traditions:

According to the Gospels and Christian traditions, Maryam had been engaged to a man called Yusuf. The angel who had announced the glad tidings of Yahya (peace be upon him) to Prophet Zakariya (peace be upon him) was the very one who gave Maryam the glad tidings of the birth of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him). Yusuf, upon hearing this, resolved to end his betrothal with Maryam; however, an angel appeared to him, and he abandoned this intention.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1, verse 18, it is written that:

*"The birth of Isa (Jesus Christ) took place in this way when His mother Maryam (Mary) had been betrothed to Yusuf (Joseph), before they came together, she was found to be with child through the power of the Holy Spirit."*¹³

⁸ Al-Imran, 3:42-43.

⁹ Al-Imran, 3:59.

¹⁰ Al-Imran, 3:55.

¹¹ Al-Nisa, 4:158-159.

¹² Al-Nisa, 4:171-172.

¹³ The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter:1, Verse:18.

The Year of Birth of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him):

According to modern research, the birth year of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) is estimated to be 3 or 4 B.C. Moreover, the birth of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) did not take place in the month of December, although among Christians December is commonly regarded as the month of his birth.

The Period of Prophethood:

The Prophethood of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) commenced at the age of thirty.

Receiving Baptism from Prophet Yahya (peace be upon him):

According to traditions, at the age of thirty, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) came from Nazareth to the region of Beit-e-Abara, which was about eighty miles from Jerusalem, to meet Prophet Yahya (peace be upon him). While baptizing Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), he said:

“I baptize with water for the purification of the body, but you shall purify their souls.”

After receiving this covenant or spiritual leadership, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) went into the wilderness and wandered in the barren and desolate region near the Dead Sea. From this very period of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) life, seclusion, ascetic practices and monasticism became a distinctive feature of Christianity. After completing forty days of seclusion, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) returned to Bait-e-Abara and began his mission of preaching. Then Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) moved towards his hometown, Nazareth. From there, he and his companions proceeded further to the northern region of the Sea of Galilee. After spending some days there, he once again set out towards Jerusalem. It was in Jerusalem that Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) received the news of the martyrdom of Prophet Yahya (peace be upon him). Consequently, he arrived in the region of the Sea of Galilee. Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) continued to preach while moving around in this region. During these years of preaching, he undertook extensive journeys. The details of this are found in the four Gospels.

The Opposition of Jewish Scholars to Prophet Isa (peace be upon him):

Due to the fame and popularity of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) among the people, the old religious authorities of Judaism began to feel threats to their positions, and they saw their seats of honor sinking. Consequently, they launched a campaign against Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) and began using his daily activities as a pretext for their opposition. During this period, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) had become known among the people as a Messenger and a reformer. The debates and disputes with the Jewish scholars continued to intensify.

In the third year of his prophethood, he came to Jerusalem and stayed in a village a few miles away from it. During this period, many Jewish scholars gathered around him and, according to a scheme, asked him various kinds of questions with the intention of accusing Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) of blasphemy. Using this as a pretext, the officials of the Roman government arrested Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), and the Jewish jury hastily passed a verdict of death against him. On Friday, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) was put on the cross, and Christians commemorate this day as “Good Friday”. According to Christian sources, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) was arrested in Jerusalem and tried in the High Council of the Jews, and sentenced to death. The enforcement of this verdict was entrusted to the Roman authorities.

The crucifixion according to the beliefs of Jews, Christians and Muslims:

For the Jews, being hung upon the cross was considered a sign of an accursed death. Therefore, the Jews did not hold a favorable opinion about Prophet Isa (peace be upon him).

According to the Christian belief, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) was crucified and thereby atoned for the sins of all mankind. According to Christian belief, Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) was resurrected on the third day, and this day is celebrated as Easter. The concept of redemption through crucifixion is known as the “Doctrine of Atonement”. Christian tradition holds that after his resurrection on the third day, Prophet Isa (Jesus) continued to appear to and meet with his chosen disciples for a period of forty days. According to Christian tradition, after forty days, he ascended into the heavens in the presence of a multitude, having assured them of his return.

According to the Islamic belief, the crucifixion of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) is entirely denied, since the Holy Qur’an categorically rejects this claim.

Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi: An Intellectual Architect of Interfaith Understanding and Christian-Muslim Relations:

Dr. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi is widely acknowledged within interfaith and academic circles as one of the leading Muslim intellectuals of the 20th century, whose contributions significantly shaped the discourse on religion and dialogue. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, a Palestinian-born American philosopher, is regarded as one of the most erudite, influential, and impactful Muslim intellectuals of the modern Islamic tradition. He was nurtured in a devout religious household, an upbringing that profoundly influenced his later contributions to Islamic thought and his engagement in interfaith dialogue. His father, an Islamic judge deeply committed to religious principles, provided a formative influence that later shaped al-Faruqi’s intellectual orientation and his engagement with interfaith discourse. Al-Faruqi possessed deep expertise in religious studies, philosophy, history, and the broader field of the humanities.

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi inspired young people to embrace the propagation of Islamic principles while emphasizing the significance of human values. Al-Faruqi’s thought was based on Qur’anic teachings, Islamic history, and philosophical analysis. Al-Faruqi’s intellectual project was rooted not only in the comparative study of world religions but also in articulating the Islamic principle of Tawhid (the Oneness of God) and advancing a comprehensive understanding of Islam, thereby, positioning Islamic thought within broader interfaith and civilizational discourses.¹⁴ Ismail Raji al-Faruqi produced a wide corpus of scholarly works, including books and articles published on an international scale, which significantly enhanced the intellectual value and global relevance of his writings.

Al-Faruqi’s life and contributions and remain an indispensable part of the Muslim world’s intellectual memory, particularly in shaping contemporary interfaith dialogue and advancing Islam’s place within the global conversation on religion and civilization. His scholarly contributions and intellectual rigor have been extensively acknowledged across literary, academic, and intellectual domains. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi pursued his academic training in Islamic philosophy and theology at Indiana University and Harvard University, from where he obtained advanced degrees in philosophy.¹⁵

Spiritual Parallels between Christianity and Islam:

Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi provided an in-depth analysis of the mystical parallels between Christianity and Islam. From the Christian standpoint, mysticism is viewed as the culmination of Prophet Isa mission and success. It embodies the requirements ordained by Prophet Isa for the radical renewal and transformation of the self. Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) called upon the Jews to abandon their conflation of God with tribal affiliation, which

¹⁴ See Tasnim Abdur Rahman, et al. Al-Faruqi’s fundamental ideas and philosophy of education. *Dinamika Ilmu: Journal Pendidikan*, 15(2) (2015): 235-247.

¹⁵ Esposito, John L. “The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World.” Oxford University Press, 2009.

they had equated with Israel, ethnicity, community, political authority, worship and even the pursuit of desire. In contrast, from an Islamic standpoint, this represents the culmination of Islam's triumph. It signifies a spiritual discipline of self-purification, whose ultimate culmination lies solely in the Divine resolve of the soul. The prophetic mission of Muhammad ﷺ in Mecca was centered on confronting and eradicating polytheism. Both Christianity and Islam share a similar understanding of mysticism, for its ultimate purpose is to cleanse the soul of all attachments except to God.¹⁶

The Transformation of Christianity:

The transformation of Christianity centered on a doctrinal focus that preceded Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), indicating that its roots extended beyond his immediate mission. Numerous doctrines were ascribed to Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), yet upon closer examination, it becomes evident that they did not, in fact, originate from him. For instance, the human condition is often framed in terms of original sin, the necessity of salvation and the figure of the savior. With regard to the discourse on man, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi employed a distinctive term, "Peccatism", suggesting that the human being is essentially a declining or fallen entity.

According to Ismail Raji al-Faruqi:

*"Christianity is fully prepared to acknowledge experiential reality, which is always one of goodness, in relation to evil. Yet, Christianity remains rigid and uncompromising, sin or evil is regarded as essential, universal, and unalterably ingrained in human nature. For want to a better term, I propose to call this aspect of Christianity Peccatism."*¹⁷

Human nature is intrinsically vulnerable to evil. Sin stands as both universal and necessary, for every human being has sinned and shall inevitably sin. What compels man, by his very nature, to engage in evil or succumb to sin?

Expounding on the Jewish heritage preserved in the book of Psalms, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi deepens the explanation to this question emphasizing that it is not merely a few individuals who are wicked, but rather that all of humanity shares in evil.

Subsequently, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi advanced the transmission of the Jewish notion of the Fall rooted in the book of Genesis into the framework of Christianity. In essence, Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) and Hawa (peace be upon her) transgressed the Divine injunction by partaking of that which was forbidden the "Tree of Life" or the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil". In this way, Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) came to be seen as the progenitor of sin, with all his descendants inheriting sin physically as their legacy from him. In committing sin, they became liable to punishment, and the penalty incurred by one man was deemed applicable to the whole of humanity. In contrast, the Qur'an presents Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) not as the father of sin, but as the father of the prophets, affirming his honored role in the divine order. Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) acquired knowledge directly from Allah, the Most Glorious, and it was this divine instruction that elevated him above the celestial beings. Allah, the Most Glorious, instructed Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) in the ways of righteousness and cautioned him against evil, laying the foundation of moral responsibility. Satan lured Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) into disobedience, enticing him to partake of the forbidden fruit and thus leading him toward wrongdoing. They

¹⁶ Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji (1999). "Christian Ethics: A historical and systematic analysis of its dominant ideas." Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen.

¹⁷ Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji. Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), P: 194.

were ensnared by his deceit, and by partaking of the fruit, they became guilty of sin. Yet God rectified Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), and he offered repentance, through which he was granted forgiveness and divine guidance.

In the Gospel accounts, Prophet Isa (Jesus) never engaged with or expounded upon the so-called “Peccatist Thesis”, leaving this construct to later theological development. Therefore, within the four canonical Gospels Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John there is no explicit reference to original sin or the fall of man, nor does Ismail Raji al-Faruqi characterize their teaching as “Peccatism”. By contrast, within the teaching of Paul distinct from what Prophet Isa (Jesus) himself had taught this notion was advanced, as Paul sought to formulate a theological foundation for the presentation of Christianity. In Paul’s theology, Prophet Isa (Jesus Christ) is proclaimed as God revealed, crucified, and resurrected, so that mankind might be delivered from the condition of sin.

As Paul says in Romans:

“Accordingly, as sin entered the world through a single man, and death through sin, death spread to all humanity, for all had sinned. By the trespass of one, multitudes perished by the guilty of one man, condemnation fell upon all. Through the disobedience of a single man, countless were constituted sinners.”¹⁸

From this passage, the “Peccatist Thesis” may rightly be ascribed to Paul’s theology, for Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) himself never addressed Adam’s transgression as an inherited burden upon all humankind.

Another distinctive concept that Ismail Raji al-Faruqi identified within Christianity is that of “the Savior”, a designation central to its theology of redemption. Within this framework, Christianity is perceived as a faith of salvation, wherein deliverance from sin is regarded as its ultimate purpose and defining characteristic. Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) is conceived as the Redeemer who delivers humanity from the burden of sin originating in the transgression of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him). Without Prophet Isa (Jesus), the original sin passed down from Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) as part of human nature remains without salvation.

According to al-Faruqi:

“Christianity stands apart in having defined salvation as its ultimate concern. It has projected a divine scheme of redemption within the very essence of God, and has envisioned the whole span of cosmic history and destiny as culminating in a single, unparalleled salvific event. To grasp this unique Christian perspective more fully, a comparison with Islam becomes essential.”¹⁹

Al-Faruqi contrasted Christianity’s doctrine of the Redeemer with Islamic thought, underscoring how Christianity centers its theology upon the salvific role of Prophet Isa (Jesus), while Islam emphasizes divine guidance, repentance, and accountability without the mediation of a savior. In Christian thought, the revelation embodied in Christ (Prophet Isa peace be upon him) is seen as the culmination of divine disclosure, which supersedes and annuls all preceding religious experiences of humanity prior to his advent. Islam, by contrast, does not regard the revelation to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as an isolated beginning. Instead, it affirms and reinstates the continuity of humanity’s earlier religious experiences, presenting his mission as the renewal and consummation of divine guidance throughout history.

¹⁸ The Holy Bible, New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011. Rom. 5:12-19 NIV.

¹⁹ Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji. “Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas.” P, 224.

Through the revelation embodied in Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), humanity is believed to have been delivered from the servitude of sin, attaining freedom through his salvific mission. In contrast, the revelation to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is understood to have emancipated humanity from the yoke of shirk and kufr, guiding mankind toward pure monotheism and submission to the Divine will. Beyond this, Christianity conceives of salvation not merely as a divine act but as intrinsic to the very essence of God's nature, shaping its entire theological framework. Christian theology holds that Prophet Isa (Jesus), regarded as God incarnate, offered Himself upon the cross as a redemptive sacrifice to atone for the primordial sin of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), thereby securing salvation for all humankind. By contrast, Islam regards Prophet Muhammad ﷺ not as God Himself but as the Messenger of Allah, whose mission was to articulate and establish the nature of the Divine will, guiding humanity toward obedience and submission to the One God.²⁰

Concerning the moral mission of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), the essence of his prophethood lay in the restoration of Judaism's authentic principles, teaching that had been obscured and tainted under rabbinic dominance and distortion. The core of Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) message revolved around two principles: the advent of the Kingdom of God, and the inward moral refinement of the soul in preparation for standing before the Divine.²¹ This, in fact, runs in parallel with the message of the prophets preceding and succeeding Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), reflecting the perennial call of divine messengers toward God's sovereignty and moral rectitude. The foundation of Islamic ethics lies in man's acknowledgment of the divine purpose embedded in his very existence, which serves as the guiding principle for his moral conduct and spiritual orientation. According to Islam, the essence of human existence is grounded in servitude to Allah, the Most Exalted, for mankind was placed upon this earth with the sole purpose of worshipping Him and living in accordance with His divine will.

In the Qur'an, Allah, the Exalted, proclaims:

*"I have created the jinn and humankind for no purpose other than that they may worship and serve Me alone."*²²

From a philosophical standpoint, it may be asserted that the very telos of human existence lies in the actualization of the supreme good that is, the consummation of Divine pleasure as the ultimate end of life. This consummation, however, transpires involuntarily, in the manner of bodily and psychological functions that operate beyond the realm of conscious choice. And freely, as in the sphere of moral responsibility. Ethical deeds realize moral values, and these represent the noblest rank within this sphere, accomplishing the loftiest requirements of god's pleasure.²³

In other terms, the essence of human creation rests upon two foundational purposes:

- * To embody servitude to Allah, the Almighty.
- * To assume the role of His vicegerent upon the earth.

Furthermore, within Christian doctrine, two major deviations neither of which trace back to Prophet Isa (Jesus) himself, are "Peccatism" and the notion of the "Redeemer". The concept of "Peccatism" concerns the essence of human existence, casting mankind as inevitably fallen and ensnared in sin. Conversely, the "Redeemer" is envisioned in Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) perceived as the one who rescues humanity from the inherited transgression of Prophet

²⁰ Ibid. Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Al-Zariyat, 51:56.

²³ Ibid.

Adam (peace be upon him). Within Islam, humanity's sojourn on earth is framed as a divine mandate to fulfill moral and spiritual duties. The sin of Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) was pardoned, as he became conscious of his error, turned in direct supplication to Allah, and was granted forgiveness.

The Qur'an affirms in Surah al-Baqarah:

"Prophet Adam was inspired with words by his lord through which he sought forgiveness, and Allah, in His infinite mercy, accepted his repentance. Truly, He is ever-forgiving, ever-compassionate."²⁴

Thus, Islam stands as the sole divinely sanctioned religion, as Allah's final Messenger, Muhammad ﷺ, imparted to humanity the universal truth of Tawhid. Yet, across the extended chain of prophets, differences were manifested in the specific teachings, laws, and ordinances revealed to each community. In their role as the followers of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Muslims are entrusted with the duty of living in accordance with the divine injunctions preserved in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (Hadith), which together constitute the foundation of Islamic law and ethics.

Results and Discussion:

This study has demonstrated that Muslim intellectual engagement with Christianity in the 20th century was marked by diverse yet complementary approaches, as reflected in the works of Ahmed Deedat and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi. Deedat, through his polemical style, direct debates, and critical analysis of the Bible, sought to defend Islam against Christian missionary claims and to affirm the authority of the Qur'an. In contrast, al-Faruqi adopted an academic and dialogical framework, emphasizing interfaith understanding, historical depth, and the broader civilizational role of Islam.

Taken together, their contributions reveal that Muslim responses to Christianity during this period were not monolithic but multifaceted, ranging from apologetic defense to constructive dialogue. Both scholars, in their distinct ways, enriched the field of comparative religion and provided Muslims with intellectual tools to engage Christianity with confidence and clarity.

The findings also highlight that the diversity of approaches polemical and dialogical was not a contradiction but rather a reflection of the broader needs of the Muslim community in the 20th century: the defense of faith on one hand and the pursuit of mutual understanding on the other. This dual legacy continues to shape contemporary interfaith engagement, making Deedat and al-Faruqi enduring figures in the ongoing discourse between Islam and Christianity.

Recommendations:

- * Academic and religious institutions in the Muslim world should encourage specialized programs in comparative religion and interfaith studies, drawing upon the methodological insights of scholars like Deedat and al-Faruqi.
- * Muslim intellectual responses to Christianity should be sensitive to changing global contexts, ensuring that apologetic strategies and dialogical efforts address contemporary challenges such as secularism, pluralism, and globalization.
- * Building upon al-Faruqi's approach, greater emphasis should be placed on interfaith dialogue not only as a means of understanding but also as a platform for cooperation in addressing common ethical, social, and humanitarian concerns.

²⁴ Al-Baqarah, 2:37.

- * The works of Deedat and al-Faruqi should be made more accessible to younger generations through translations, digital platforms, and educational curricula so that their contributions can continue to inform Muslim-Christian engagement.
- * Further research is recommended to explore the impact of their legacies in contemporary contexts, particularly in regions where Muslim-Christian relations remain a pressing issue.

Limitations of the Study:

- * This study is limited to the approaches of two key Muslim intellectuals Ahmed Deedat and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, while many other scholars have also contributed significantly to Muslim-Christian engagement in the 20th century.
- * The analysis primarily focuses on the intellectual and religious contexts of the mid-to-late 20th century. Thus, the study does not fully address contemporary developments in Muslim-Christian relations in the 21st century.
- * The comparative framework relies on secondary sources and existing interpretations of Deedat's and al-Faruqi's works, which may not capture the entirety of their intellectual contributions or personal intentions.
- * The study focuses largely on South Africa (in the case of Deedat) and North America (in the case of al-Faruqi). Muslim-Christian encounters in other regions, such as the Middle East, South Asia, or Africa beyond South Africa, are not extensively covered.
- * Some of Deedat's works were delivered orally in lectures and debates, and al-Faruqi's writings are highly academic, hence the reliance on translated and published materials may limit the depth of analysis.

Suggestions for Future Research:

- * Future research may expand beyond Deedat and al-Faruqi to include other influential Muslim scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman and Seyyed Hossein Nasr in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim approaches to Christianity.
- * Further research could explore how the legacies of Deedat and al-Faruqi continue to influence 21st century Muslim-Christian relations, particularly in the context of globalization, migration, and interfaith initiatives.

Considering the rise of digital media, future research could examine how online platforms, social media, and digital debates shape contemporary interfaith discourse compared to the traditional methods employed by Deedat and al-Faruqi



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