CHAPTER I

INDIA'S CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS — A GENERAL SURVEY

CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

The history of the Christian community in India is as old as Christianity itself. India can be said to be one of the largest Christian countries of the world since 2.71% of its total population is Christians. The population of India, according to the 1981 census of India, is 683,810,051, out of which 17,780,200 are Christians. This makes them the third largest religious group in India. The Indian Christians are also divided into several Christian denominations. But they could be broadly conceived of as Catholics and Protestants forming 1.716% and 1% respectively, of the total population of India.1

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Three distinctive phases can be noticed in the growth of the Catholic Church in India. The first phase begins with the spread of Christianity in Kerala in the first century itself. Church historians unanimously agree that Christianity in India started in Kerala. The Syrian Christians of Kerala, who constitute about 25% of the Catholic population in India traditionally believe that their forefathers were privileged to have received baptism at the hands of St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. There is a small group of authors who deny this claim. But the majority of the historians support the South-Indian mission of St. Thomas in view of the living tradition of the community and the existence of the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore, Madras.2
A.M. Mundadan, one of the leading historians of the Indian Church, puts this traditional belief as follows:

According to the Indian tradition, St. Thomas came by sea, and first landed at Cranganore about the year 52 A.D.; converted high caste Hindu families in Cranganore.... and in other places; crossed over to China and preached the Gospel, returned to India and organized the Christians of Malabar under some guides (priests).... erected a few public places of worship. He suffered martyrdom in A.D. 72 and his body was buried in a holy shrine, he had built at Mylapore.

Some other traditions, not very important and popular, also exist about the origin of the early Christian communities in Kerala. For example, St. Bartholomew, another disciple of Jesus Christ, is also associated with St. Thomas in establishing Church in Kerala. Another tradition would ascribe the beginning of Christianity in India to the work of Christians merchants and missionaries of the East Syrian or Persian Church. There is a later tradition that another Thomas, a bishop from Edessa came to Malabar (Kerala) with a group of Christians, from Iran in 345 A.D., who became the instrument in spreading Christianity on the Malabar coasts. However, nobody denies the existence of a strong Christian community in Kerala from the early centuries of Christian era.

This earliest Christian community comprised mainly of converts from higher castes of the Indian society in the South. But as far as its theology, liturgy and organizational structure were concerned it relied exclusively on the formulae and thought patterns taken over from the Syrian Churches in the Middle East and thus inherited the name of "Syrian Church." It possessed an extraordinary vitality throughout the centuries, though its activities were geographically
restricted in Kerala. The advent of the Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century made the position of the Syrian Christians rather uncomfortable. "Catholic India", a brochure published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (C.B.C.I.), gives us the following picture of the Syrian Church:

Till the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 one might say that the St. Thomas Christians were living as if they were in two worlds: the geographical, political and social world of the Malabar coast and the ecclesiastical world which was more or less Chaldean in character, for Chaldean Prelates governed them in spiritual matters and they shared the theological, juridical and liturgical traditions of the Chaldean Church.6

The second phase of the growth of the Church in India is represented by the Padroado and Propaganda Mission. With the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498 the position of Christians in India took a new turn. The Western form of Christianity, inseparably mixed with political and ecclesiastical elements with a view to mission and thus colonial expansion, was introduced into India. Later missionaries from many countries of Europe and America established a western styled Latin form of mission and Church in India. The intervention of these foreign missionaries in the affairs of the Syrian Church did more harm than good to the latter which subsequently split into many denominations. The most important among them, besides the Catholics, are the Jacobites and the Marthomites. However there were missionaries like Robert de Nobili, who appreciated the traditions and culture of the Indian people and worked for indigenization and inculturation. The dedicated work of the missionaries among the tribals and the scheduled castes of India from the middle of the 19th century led
to a mass movement towards Christianity.  

The third phase begins with the independence of India in 1947. Since then there has been a greater acceleration towards indigenization of the Church in India in terms of its personnel, theology, liturgy and administration. The Indian Church is continuing its mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to the millions of people especially in the rural areas of India.

**Activities of the Church**

The Catholic Church in India has a large number of dedicated men and women to carry out its manifold functions in the various fields of its apostolate. The active members of the Church, besides thousands of devoted laymen and women, include 125 bishops, 12,320 priests, 2,411 religious brothers and 49,956 religious women. These men and women spend much of their time in prayer and meditation and work for the spiritual renewal of the members of their own community. Some of them even lead a purely contemplative life.

Besides attending to the spiritual needs of the people, the clergy and the religious of the Indian Church, pay special attention to the temporal needs of the Indian people without distinction of caste, creed and religion. As K.P. Kesava Menon remarks, in the earliest days, the works of the Christians were confined to the preaching of the Gospel. But gradually they began to pay more attention to the needs and requirements of the people for a better and happier life. The greatest contribution of the Church to India is certainly in the field of education. They are the pioneers of education, specially that of English, in many states of India. Their contribution in the field of non-formal education is also substantial.
and praiseworthy. The Christian missionaries have also made valuable contributions for the development of languages, literature, and culture of the places wherever they have lived and worked. In the words of Kesava Menon "There is no denying of the fact that Christianity has enriched the composite culture of India by adding its own share". The Christians have focused their attention also on the sick, disabled, physically handicapped etc. Many of the Church members are actively involved in the social service schemes and rural development programmes.

The Church in India is not insensitive to the members of other religions. Dialogue with the adherents of non-Christian religions is considered as an inevitable aspect of the Indian Church's fidelity to bear witness to the message of Jesus Christ. "In view of the fact that India has nurtured several of the world's great religions, the Church in India is called upon to be an earnest pioneer of inter-religious dialogue." In view of this, many Christians, especially priests and religious, have dedicated themselves to the study of other religions. In these years especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) under the guidance and encouragement of the Dialogue Commission of the C.B.C.I., many multi-religious dialogue meetings, live togethers and prayer seminars are organized throughout the country by Christians in collaboration with the members of other religions.

Non-Catholic Christians of India

A great variety of denominations exists within the Church and most of them have their followers and communities in India. The
total number of the non-Catholic Christians in India would approxi-
mately amount to one percent of the Indian population. Since it
is impossible to give here a detailed description of all the Christian
groups found in India only a few of their striking features are
mentioned below.

Dissent and division appeared first in the Kerala Church at
the beginning of the 17th century. The relationship of the St.Thomas
Christians with the Eastern Orthodox Church and the imprudent and
unnecessary involvement of the Portuguese missionaries in the af-
fairs of the Syrian Church, although with good intentions, are the
main factors among many other, that caused disunity and divisions
in the ancient Christian community of St. Thomas. A Syrian Orthodox
Prelate, Aithallah, by name, arrived in Mylapore in August, 1652.
The Portuguese missionaries fearing that his coming would create
confusion in the Church, transported him to Goa and on their way
halted at Cochin. The Syrian community tried their best to get him
released, but all in vain. According to Cardinal Tisserant, the
Portuguese spread the less palatable news that the unfortunate pre-
late was accidently drowned.12 To revenge this, many of the Syrian
Christians assembled in front of the "Koonan Cross" at Mattancherry,
a suburb of Cochin and took an oath on the 3rd January 1653, that
they would not tolerate any interference of the Portuguese clergy
in the affairs of Malabar Church. This revolt paved the way for
the emergence of schisms and divisions in the Syrian community. The
important groups among them are the Jacobites, Marthomites and the
Syrian Orthodox Christians.
The Western Protestant missionaries came to India first as chaplains on the East India Company's ships. To protect its commercial interest, the British East India Company not only catered to the interests of the non-Christian religions, but also curtailed Christian proselytism in order to avoid the displeasure of Hindus and Muslims. Only after a heated contest and hard work, the evangelicals secured in 1813 through a renewed company charter, the permission to start mission work in India. Even the British Churches, being pre-occupied with rationalism and Deism, were not keen to undertake missions in India. 13

The first impulse to Protestant missions in India came from Denmark. Ziegenbailg and Plutschau, the first Lutheran missionaries arrived in Tranquebar in 1706 where they could establish a small community and build a Church. Frederick Schwartz (1726-1798), most famous among the S.P.C.K. missionaries and others worked in several towns of South India and established several Churches, schools and congregation of 20,000 Christians. Baptist missionaries headed by Williams Carey arrived in Calcutta and started their work at Serampore. William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward - known as the Serampore Trio - had a clearly laid out programme which called for:

1) the widespread preaching of the Gospel by every possible method; 2) the support of the preaching by the distribution of the Bible in the languages of the country; 3) the establishment at the earliest possible moment of a Church; 4) a profound study of the background and thought of the non-Christian people 5) the training at the earliest possible moment of an indigenous ministry. 14
**Anglican Missions:** Although the East India Company did not encourage missionaries to work in its territory, it appointed Anglican chaplains to minister to its employees and officials. The most important among those chaplains was Henry Martyn (1781-1812) who awakened missionary zeal within the Church of England. In 1813 the Company permitted to carry on mission work in India and the Bishopric of Calcutta was established. Since then important missionary societies of the Anglicans like the Society for Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.C.G.), Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), Lutheran Mission Society (L.M.S.) have worked with zeal and success in the various parts of India.

Our Protestant denominations began their mission in India from the early years of the 19th century. The American Board of Foreign Missions started working at Ahmednagar in 1831 and in the Madurai Mission since 1833. The American Presbyterians chose the United Provinces (U.P.) and Punjab as their field of activities. The American Baptists began their successful Telugu Mission in 1840 and the Assam Mission in 1841. The Basel Mission (lutheran) started its work in 1836 in the present day Karnataka while the Danish Lutherans concentrated in Tamil Nadu, which was later taken up by the Germans of the Zeipsig Missionary Society. 15

**Armenian Christians:** From the 16th century onwards Armenian Christians were found in increasing numbers in the main commercial centres like Agra, Delhi, Surat, Benares, Bombay, Madras, Patna and Dacca. The Armenian chapel in the old cemetry of Agra dates back to
1562. The Armenians were merchants and they belonged mostly to
the Armenian communities of Iran. They built churches and educa-
tional centres, but did not try to spread their faith, the supreme
patriarch of which resides at Echmiadzin in Soviet Armenia. A
large number of them became Indianized through inter-marriages with
the local Catholics and Protestants. Today small communities of
Armenian Christians can be found in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. 16

Church of Scotland: Alexander Duff (1806–1876) was the first of-
official missionary of the Church of Scotland to India who brought forth
revolutionary changes in the field of missions by his idea of evan-
gelism through education. 17 He advocated Western education for the
Indians, an idea which had the strongest support of Raja Ram
Mohan Roy. This educational theory was adopted and adapted by all
the Christian denominations in India. 18 A large number of Christian
institutions of higher learning flourished and still continue to
grow in India, a fact which is very much benefitted and appreciated
even by non-Christians.

Ecumenical Movements: The most significant development that has
taken place among the non-Catholic Christians of India after the
Independence is the ecumenical attempt to unify the several Chris-
tians denominations of India. As a result, two such groups – Church
of South India (C.S.I.) and Church of North India (C.N.I.) have
succeeded in bringing unity and uniformity of religious beliefs and
practices among a large number of Protestant groups. 19 The
Methodists, Congregationalists, Scottish and Canadian, Presbyterians,
Salvation Army etc. still exist and function separately.
Activities of the Protestant Church

The Protestant Churches in India carry out the same type of missionary activities as those of the Catholic Church. The contribution of Protestant missionaries to the development of vernacular literature of India through the Christian Literature Society (C.LS) is certainly significant. Translations of the Bible into all the languages of India and the writing of Catechisms, books of doctrinal instruction, had a marked influence in developing prose writing in Indian languages. Missionaries were the first to prepare accurate grammars and dictionaries in many of the Indian languages. To this must be added the value of the historical records, the descriptions of the country and those of the people, the missionaries have left for posterity. Their service in the field of education especially among the women, is appreciated by all. Besides involving themselves in several social service schemes and humanitarian projects, they run orphanages, hospitals and homes for the aged and disabled members of the society.

ISLAM IN INDIA

Muslims are the second largest religious community in India with an approximate number of 81 million and thus constitute 12.2% of the total population of India. According to the census of 1911 the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent numbered 66 millions which formed more than one-fifth of the Indian population and one-third of the world Muslim population. At the time of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 one-fourth of the Indian population was Muslim. An estimated number of six million Muslims migrated
India to Pakistan which reduced the percentage of the Muslim population considerably. Still India has the third position in the number of Muslims in the world. First and second positions are given to Indonesia and Pakistan respectively. As Dr. Trellick remarks, the geographical distribution of Indian Muslims is rather uneven. In Kashmir they number 90 per cent of the population, but other places like the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have only microscopic proportions of Muslims.

Spread of Islam in India: There are many factors which paved the way for the rapid growth of Islam in India. The non-Muslims were, to a certain extent, and even today are, accustomed to attribute it to the military arms of Muslim soldiers. But as Christian Trellick rightly points out, "forced conversions did occur, but they do not account for the bulk of the Indian Muslim population." In the words of Professor K.A. Nizami "Islam spread in India mainly through four processes — conquest, conversion, colonization and migration.

The oppressed and the low caste people of India were delighted and attracted to embrace Islam through the life example and preaching of the Muslim mystics on the equality and brotherhood of all believers in Islam. "The simplicity of the Muslim creed" remarks Dr. Ishwari Prasad "was another cause of its successful growth in India." In the opinion of Sir T. Arnold, "it is not in the efforts of the fanatic rulers that we shall look for the popularity and spread of Islam but in the quiet and continuous labours of the preachers and the traders who have carried their faith into every quarter of the globe." Thus the zealous preaching, life and activity of the pious Sufi saints, the principle of equality and brotherhood, the
worship of the One God without complicated rituals and ceremonies, the political and social pressures, use of force, advent of Muslim migrants etc. have contributed greatly to the rapid spread of Islam in India.

**Sufi Orders**: Sufism, a term broadly used for Islamic mysticism, gives more stress to the activities of the inner self for direct experience of God, than to the performance of external rituals. At the earliest stage Sufism appeared as an ascetic movement. Protesting against the secular tendency of the Umayyad Caliphs, a few pious Muslims withdrew from the world to find peace of mind in a life of seclusion, prayer and renunciation. Islamic mysticism is also considered as a reaction against the purely rationalist approach of the Mu'tazilites and other free thinkers, for whom reason alone was the ultimate norm of true knowledge. An outstanding feature of Sufism is the high status accorded to the spiritual 'Masters' or 'pira' who possess supernatural powers. These guide their disciples (murid) through the right path (al-tarica) and will intercede for them with God on the Day of Judgement. Several Sufi silsilahs or Orders were formed around such holy, gifted and charismatic Piras or masters.25

India, known for its pantheistic philosophy, Sishies and 'ashramas' naturally became a fertile soil for Sufi mysticism. By the end of the twelfth century, when Islam began to spread rapidly in India, different Sufi orders were also introduced and established in several parts of the country. What impressed the Indian masses most, were the stories of the miracles performed by the Sufis and it is perhaps, to them that almost all large scale conversions of non-Muslims are to be traced.26
**Groups Among Indian Muslims**: Various groups of Muslims can be found in the Muslim community. According to a tradition attributed to Abdullah ibn Umar, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have predicted that his followers would split into seventy-three sects. The prophecy was fulfilled except that in the course of thirteen centuries the total number of the sects has considerably exceeded seventy three. According to tradition attributed to Ali, it is said that his followers would split into seventy-three sects, though the prophecy was fulfilled except that in the course of thirteen centuries the total number of the sects has considerably exceeded seventy three.27

The Sunnis who constitute nearly 90% of the Muslims population of the world, claim to be the orthodox group or traditionalists (Ahlul-Sunnah). In India too, the vast majority of the Muslims belong to the Sunni group. The Shias, the followers or the adherents to the cause of Ali, form the second largest group in the Muslim world. These too, have in India a substantial following, which is the largest community of Shias outside Iran.

The Shia groups found in India are those collectively called "Ismaili" and also the Sabiyah or "seveners". The Bohras are a subdivision of the Ismailis, chiefly residing in Bombay and Baroda, who are mainly the descendants of Hindu converts through the work of missionaries from Yemen. In 1588 this group was again subdivided into Daudia and Sulaimania owing to the rival claimants to the leadership. The Khojas are another subdivision of the Ismailis residing chiefly in the Punjab, Sind, Gujarat, Bombay, Poona and Hyderabad. Their origin is traced back to the arrival of some Fatimids in the eleventh century who settled down in Gujarat, Sind and Multan and tried to adapt their peculiar doctrines to the prevailing Hindu beliefs and practices. The Khojas are also divided into Aghakhani and Punjabi Khojas. The Aghakhanis, who form the main
body recognize Aga Khan as their spiritual head while the Punjabi Khejas turn to pirs of Chishti and Qadiri Orders for their spiritual leadership.

**Muslim Educational Centres**

The Muslim religious educational system in India does not differ much from the traditional method found elsewhere in the Muslim World. In the mosque schools (maktabs) the children are taught elementary principles of reading and writing, Quran recitation and lessons in religious law (fiqh). Then they go to madrasas where Islamic sciences pertaining chiefly to the Quran with the commentaries. Tradition (Hadith) and the fiqh are taught. The most important madrasa in the whole of the Muslim world next to al-Azhar in Cairo, is the Dar-al-Uloom (abode of science) at Deoband, and small town in U.P. where more than 1,500 Muslim young men including 500 from abroad are undergoing their training in Islamic sciences. The madrasa is not only a training institution but also a centre to guide the community by giving correct interpretations to the religious principles and suggesting solutions and authoritative directives (fatwa) to the problems which the Muslims face in the modern world.

Besides the above mentioned religious educational institutions, the Indian Muslims run three Government sponsored Universities - Aligarh Muslim University, U.P., Osmania University, Hyderabad and Jamia Millia, Delhi. They have numerous schools, colleges, technical institutions, hospitals orphanages, research and publication centres throughout India. Their efforts to give due importance
to do research and publication of books, periodicals and other Islamic literature are also praiseworthy. There are several political and socio-religious organizations among the Indian Muslims which are very active in their operations. A few of the important organizations are in 'Muslim League', 'Jamat-ul-ulema', Tablighi Jamaat, Muslim Educational Society (M.E.S.) etc.

The contributions of the Indian Muslims in the fields of culture, literature, music, architecture painting etc. are certainly significant and have won international reputation and recognition. The Urdu language, a beautiful mixture of Hindi, Persian and Arabic with its vast literature and poetry is a signal contribution to Indian culture. Their share in the development of regional language like Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati etc. is also to be appreciated. Poetic gatherings (mushairas) are an important element of Urdu culture and remain very popular even among the non-Muslims of India. The mosques, forts, palaces, gardens, tombs of Delhi, Agra, Ajmer, Hyderabad, Bijapur testify to the best creative art of Muslim architecture in India.

It is rather difficult to make any generalization about Indian Muslims, since they are spread over a geographical area of culturally distinct regions.

Dr. Troll writes about it as follows:

What is true of the Muslims of North India may not be true of Muslims from Hyderabad, Kerala or Bengal,...The Muslims of North India and Bengal have been greatly swayed by strong political motives. Economic, Social and cultural separatism gained there with the revivalist Hindu and Muslim movements of the nineteenth century. The Muslims of South have always been more integrated into their respective regions.29

Dr. Victor Courtois, however, observes a unity in diversity among
Indian Muslims. He writes:

Inspite, however, of this dispersion throughout the country, inspite of racial disparity and diversity of languages (Indian Muslims speak at least 15 languages) inspite of sharp political division, this enormous mass of men form a compact block, amazingly homogeneous where religion is concerned.30

Dr. Troll also points out some of the distinctive features of Indian Muslims as follows:

Indian Muslims . . . . are less dominated by rituals and the compliance with external obligations than, say, Muslims of the Arabian peninsula. They accept, of course, the observance of all that is demanded by the Law theoretically, and respect it, but they live in a rather more relaxed and free atmosphere. The Indian Muslim's life, customs, ceremonies and reaction to occasions of grief and joy in life, are greatly influenced by attitudes and practices of his countrymen without, however, allowing himself to merge completely with them. . . . Furthermore, in India, Islam is more 'internalized' and personalized than elsewhere.31

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

The history of relations between Christians and Muslims till recently was either in the form of uneasy co-existence or hostile confrontation. Before analysing the Indian situation it is worthwhile to see the general attitude of the Church towards Muslims and vice versa.

Church and Muslims

The Church in general showed a negative attitude towards Islam, because ever since its inception Islam remained a political and ideological threat to Christianity. It not only conquered many of the Christian countries like Syria, Egypt, and Spain but also attacked several of the cardinal dogmas of the Church related to the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption etc. The scandalous warfare
of Crusades could be pointed out as the culmination of the hostile spirit of Christendom towards Islam. The inhuman dealings and atrocities committed on non-Muslims by some ruthless Muslim rulers, for their own selfish and vested interests are also responsible for this mutual disrespect, fear and animosity.

The polemic works of Christians in Middle Ages against Islam helped to perpetuate the hostility between the two religions. Christian apologists gathered information about Islam with the definite purpose of undermining it. While the Orientalists tried to depict Islam as a heretical religion, the Westerners attempted to discover the Judeo-Christian elements in it. In the opinion of James both the Orientalists and the occidentalists agreed on one point that Islam has nothing original and that it consisted in a confused combination of native Arabian heathenism, Judaism, Christianity and Zorastrianism.

The Church considering itself as the unique means or 'sacrament' of salvation for the whole of humanity hesitated to regard non-Christian religions as ways of salvation. This claim for uniqueness and superiority reached such a stage as to deny salvation to all those who do not belong to its visible structure through baptism. This attitude is well expressed in the famous axiom "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (no salvation outside the Church). James analyses the real meaning of this axiom as follows:

This axiom goes back to the image of the ark of Noah used in 1 Peter 3:20 to portray salvation through baptism. What is actually intended in this text is that there is salvation inside the ark. It is surprising to see how this text has been explained in such a way as to deny salvation for those who are outside the ark. The affirmation of salvation for
those who are inside the ark does not imply a denial of salvation for those who are outside.34

This phrase was formulated and developed in the early Church by men like Ignatius of Antioch (d.107), Irenaeus (135–202), Clement of Alexandria (d.215) etc; but it was Cyprian (200-258) who first applied it, using the ark as an illustration, with juridical exclusiveness. St. Augustine (354-430) and other scholastic writers followed in the same trend of thought. The Council of Florence (1442) finally defined the Church’s attitude towards non-Catholics in the following words:

....those who lived outside the Catholic Church not only pagans but also Jews, heretics and schismatics, could not become participants in eternal life but would depart into everlasting fire, unless before the end of life they returned to the Church.35

This attitude was later softened by the Church when it declared that anybody can become a member of the Church either through baptism or through desire although those who belong to the latter group are deprived of many gracious heavenly gifts. Till the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the pluralism of religious was considered to be the greatest hurdle or threat to the uniqueness and the universality of the Church. The attitude of the Church towards Islam should be evaluated against this background. This could be easily done by analysing the Church’s attitude towards the prophet Muhammad and the Quran.

Muhammad: Muhammad whom the Muslims revere as the final prophet was, in the past, a constant object of personal attack and ridicule on the part of Christians. Summa Totius Haereticarum Saracenorum written by Peter the Venerable (1094-1156) is largely responsible for
creating and maintaining a distorted image of Muhammad among the Christians through out the centuries. According to Peter, prophet Muhammad rose from his low status and poverty to respect and wealth through his ingenuity and cleverness in handling worldly affairs. He used force to assume leadership of the people. But when he realized that he could not thus become their king, he tried to become their leader under cloak of religion and prophethood. “The impious and wretched Muhammad, who denied Christianity whereby men are saved led people astray and condemned them to the devil and eternal death.”36 This misconceived and inaccurate presentation of the life of Muhammad, which was definitely contrary to the facts of history created a hostile attitude towards Muhammad in the heart of many Christians which persisted till recently. The two most immoral aspects of Muhammad’s life, Christians believed, were his sexual licence and his use of force to establish his religion. The content of his teachings was explained in terms of Jewish and heterodox Christian influences and the manner of revelation alleged of him was taken to disprove his prophetic claim.37 Muhammad was even considered a blasphemer, since he made use of religion to justify sin and weakness. However there were some orientalists who tried to work out a more objective picture of Muhammad. But it took a long time for their views to get official acceptance in the Catholic Church and so the tendency to accuse Muhammad as imposter prevailed.
THE QURAN

As the Christian writers rejected the prophethood of Muhammad, so they also refused to accept the divine sources of the Quran. It was considered to be incompatible with Sacred Scriptures in its inherent qualities, and in disagreement with philosophy and natural reason. Based on the writings of Peter the Venerable, the Christian scholars maintained that the sources of the Quran were the apocryphal literature of Christianity and Nestorianism. Thus the concept that the Quran depended on various sources for its origin was widely accepted among Christians for centuries. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, Muhammad seduced the Arabs with his Quran which contained precepts that permitted free rein to carnal pleasures.

James summarises the attitude of the Church towards Islam until the Second Vatican Council as follows:

The prevalent attitude of the Catholic Church towards Islam was one of condemnation in so far as Islam appeared to be a new religion which sought to supplant Christianity and denied its principal dogmas: the Trinity, Incarnation and Salvation. Besides, the Church believed that the revelation which was completed with the death of the last apostle of Christ could not be further extended by a new prophet, and this view categorically denied all claims of Muhammad to prophethood. This attitude continued to be traditional: Islam was necessarily condemned, Muhammad was a false prophet, the Quran was a collection of errors, the truths contained in it were taken from the Bible and so on.

THE NEW ATTITUDE

The Second Vatican Council marks a real turning point in the history of the Church’s relationship to non-Christain religions. For, through the Conciliar decrees there developed an existential concern for people as people, whether within or without the Catholic
Church. As far as the religion of Islam is concerned, the most important change indicated by the Council is its willingness to view Islam positively, instead of looking at its weak points. A few relevant sentences from the conciliar Decrees are given below:

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.42

But the most important text, which was very widely appreciated and quoted by the Arab press, is the following statements:

The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent..... They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God..... Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honour.....

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissension have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.43

This new attitude, shown by the Council, is certainly the result of the thoughts and sincere attempts of many Catholic theologians of the present century, among whom Louis Massignon (1883-1962) stands out as the most important inspiring pioneer. Basetti -Sani pays the following tribute to Massignon:

We have to recognize the fact that in the scientific world of Islamologists and in the Roman Catholic Church, the French Orientalist, Professor Louis Massignon (1883-1962), was the personality who influenced, more than any other, the new orientation in the study of Islam. He discovered the spiritual values of Islam while studying the mystics of the Muslim community, particularly Ibn Mansour Al-Hallaj (856-922)....since the researches of Massignon, some Catholic theologians have begun to reflect with a new spirit on the religious phenomenon of Islam.44
James too, agrees that Massignon helped in creating a deep renewal of the Christian view of Islam before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. The Council texts relating to Muslims are greatly influenced by his insights and the thought of his disciples.45

After the Council, the Church has effectively launched a campaign to arouse interest among the Catholics to collaborate and cooperate with the Muslims in all possible ways. The establishment of the Secretariat for Non-Christians in 1965 with a separate wing for Christian-Muslim relations is a concrete step in this direction. This Secretariat has already played a significant role in creating respect and appreciation for Muslims among the Catholics through its publications and various ways of contacts with the Muslim world. The phenomenal increase in the number of Christian-Muslim dialogue at various levels, taking place throughout the world, is certainly one of the most significant contributions of Vatican the Second. Sincere dialogue is recognised today as the most efficacious means of pulling down the centuries’ old prejudices and misunderstandings and also of building up bridges of mutual love, respect, cordiality and solidarity among Christians and Muslims. Thus the Catholic Church, in the words of James “after the Second Vatican Council, has initiated a new era of relationship with Muslims, a relationship that has adopted a sympathetic and positive approach for the purpose of harmonious co-existence and collaboration.”46
Muslim Perception of Christianity

Dr. Terence Farias has recently made a scientific survey on the question of "Muslim Perception of Christian Community". Though his study was confined to India, yet to some extent, it reflects the general opinion of Muslims towards Christians all over the world. A short summary of his findings is given below.

According to his observation, Indian Muslims have an ambiguous picture of their Christian neighbours. "On the one hand" says Terence there are elements in it (in the Christian Community) which the Muslim admires and appreciates, on the other, there are certain things which he dislikes and by which (he) is repelled and scandalized." Terence has categorized such elements as the 'strengths' and 'shortcomings' of Christians.

The strengths of Christians: The vast majority of the Muslims, whom he interviewed and who answered his questionnaires, admired the Christians for their sense of service, love, kindness and compassion. They specially appreciated the service which Christians render to the poor and the downtrodden. One of the respondents has the following words of appreciation for Christianity:

In one word (I admire) their 'Catholicity' and all it stands for, their human and humane approach to all human problems, especially concerning the 'underdogs' of the world. 'Service to humanity is the road to God' seems to be their practical motto. This motto they share with the believers of other semite religions. But none other than they have so much succeeded in translating this principle of faith into a daily practice.
The Christians express their sense of service to humanity by running efficiently many educational and charitable institutions - schools and hospitals in particular. A retired Deputy Director of Education, expresses his view about Christian institutions thus:

Their institutions are doing good service to humanity, especially in the field of education and medicine. They have indeed played a very great part in civilizing the scheduled castes and tribes and the backward classes by giving them education. As a retired Deputy Director of Education of Gujarat State, I appreciate the great discipline and character in Catholic institutions.

A good many of the respondents expressed their view that they found Christians to be kind and peaceful people, non-quarrelsome and non-communal. They are not fanatics in their approach to inter-community relations. Many of the female respondents appreciated the monogamous marriage system of the Christians. They are of the opinion that women enjoy equal freedom and rights with men in Christianity. Among the many other things which the Muslims find admirable among the Christians, special mention is made of their dedication to work, zeal for social work, their organization for self-help and the adaptability of their faith to the modern conditions. A very few mentioned that the Christians have the same concept of the unity of God as that of the Muslims. Many others were impressed by the manner in which prayer services are conducted in the Churches - inspiring, expressive and solemn.

The shortcomings of Christians: Dr. Terence has classified the shortcomings of Christians as pointed out by the Muslim respondents into three groups - structural, moral and theological. The Catholic
community according to many, is divided into two main groups: the clergy and the laity. The clergy being educated makes itself respected by the laity and has a place of distinction and honour in the community. The laity is ignorant, not so moral and has not much attached to religion.

The moral standard of the Catholic community was very severely criticised by the vast majority of the respondents. As proofs of this "moral laxity" or loose character they pointed out the immodest dress of Christian women, too free mixing of sexes, dances and parties, high incidence of alcoholism, and eating pork. Many Muslims have complained against the methods employed by Christian missionaries to propagate their religion. Even unfair means are made use of to attract people to their faith.52

In the field of theology it is pointed out that the concept of Trinity of the Christians is incompatible with the concept of unity of God. In the words of Terence:

Some Muslims have the idea that for the Christians Mary is one of the persons of the Trinity which they worship. The notions of Trinity and the incarnation smack of Hinduism—the multiplicity of gods. Jesus is only a prophet, but the Christians wrongly worship him as God..... The Muslims think that Christians believe in three gods (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)....In practice Catholic worship with its many statues and pictures amounts to idolatry. The veneration given to the saints is so much that even God Himself could be envious of it. On the whole, Catholics give an impression that they take their religion lightly. Only once a week they go to Church, while Muslims pray five times a day.... In India Christianity is being Hinduized and thus is losing its identity. Christians are allies of the West and they are disliked because U.S.A. which is a Christian power is helping Israel.53
It seems that the Muslims in general appreciate the international order of the Church and the office and person of the Pope. However they admired the priests and nuns, not for their religiosity but for their efficiency in running schools, organizational skills and for their thirst for knowledge. Their lives have only very little impact on the lives of the people. A good many expressed disapproval of the celibate state of the priests and nuns. Regarding the clergy it was said by many that the Christian priest is a person who live in luxury and comfort. He takes priestly life more as a profession rather than a vocation. About the sisters the respondents did not say that they live in luxury, but that they were money minded. Their schools cater to the richer classes. A few expressed suspicion about the motive of the service rendered by the priests and sisters. Many attribute this service mentality to the desire of converting or to some political motive. 54

Dr. Terence has further analysed the factors that have influenced the Muslims to form such a negative opinion about Christians. According to his findings, the sources from where the Muslims gather their information about Christianity, namely the Muslim press and the Ulama, are ill-informed of the true image of the Christian community. History too seems to have contributed its share in shaping the image Muslims have of Christians. For example, Christianity came to several areas of India and Asia with the colonial powers, sometimes acting as the religious wing of these powers. Many of the Muslim countries of the Middle East have been long under the domination of the Christian colonial powers. So it is byt natural
that the Muslims are prone to identify Christianity with the Western powers. Among the sociological reasons that helped the Muslims to form the above mentioned opinion, Dr. Terence points out that by and large, the Christian community in India has been more Western in its customs, norms and values than the other communities. So Indians not only Muslims, identify Christianity with the West. Finally the Muslims come to know of Christianity through Muslim sources and they have very little opportunity to know of it from Christian sources. Hence the Muslim image of the Christian community is bound to be distorted.

CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN INDIA

The overall tradition of Christian-Muslim relations in India has certainly been encouraging and praiseworthy throughout the centuries. Although the European missionaries brought to India all the ignorance and prejudice regarding Islam that have prevailed in Europe, there existed a friendly and cordial relationship between the Muslims and Christians of India. The minority status of both religions, Islam and Christianity in a predominantly Hindu country, might have helped their adherents to live in harmony and friendship.

The presence of Jesuit missionaries at the Mughal court from 1579 A.D. onwards till the end of the 17th century is a unique example of religious tolerance and respect in the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the whole world. Many elements of 'dialogue', in the modern sense of the term were certainly not present there, since the Emperor Akbar was interested only in a
religious discussion for his various intentions while the missionaries were mainly motivated to convert the emperor and through him the people. Dr. Troll describes the situation correctly: "On the Muslim side, the divines were of the same mentality as the priests, but Akbar and Abul Fazl in particular, showed an openness to discussion which would reflect no small credit on a modern proponent of dialogue." 57

Henry Martyn (1781–1812) opened a new era in the approach of the Christians towards Muslims in India. He preferred personal contact and sharing of religious experiences rather than disputations and controversies to convey the message of Christ to Muslims. He purposely set out to appreciate whatever was best in his Muslim friends and ascribe such to the activity of God. In the words of Dr. Troll,

He (Henry Martyn) stressed the need to direct attention to the Sacred Scriptures of Islam and Christianity themselves rather than to later, scholastic elaborations and insisted on the need for fostering lasting friendship with the enquirer. Finally he stressed the centrality of God's work in the souls of men and consequent reverence and respect for souls. 58

Carl Gottlieb Pfander (1803-65) reversed the positive approach started by Henry Martyn. The public debates between Pfander and Muslim scholars and the literature they produced laid foundation for future controversies and apologetic writings. These made the Indian Muslims to suspect the missionary efforts of the Christians as a plot to destroy Islam in India. Dr. S.V. Bhajjan, the present director of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies Hyderabad, describes the result of this approach thus:
They (the Muslims) think that Christian missionaries from the West came to destroy the religion of Islam and help the foreign powers, especially the British, to conquer and subjugate India. Indian missionaries preaching to Muslims are considered paid workers of the foreign missionaries and incapable of studying and understanding Islam. The image of an Indian "padre" in the mind of a Muslim has been that of an arrogant, deceitful and number one enemy of Islam.59

This approach of confrontation underwent some drastic changes in the nineteenth century. Many of the later missionaries adopted a quite different attitude. George A. Lefroy deserves special mention here because he took the initiative to explore the positive religious message of Islam. The older controversial literature in his opinion was "very hard indeed, as though intended to confute the enemy rather than to win a disguised friend".

Among the Indian Muslims Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) occupies an important place in the history of Christian-Muslim dialogue in India. Dr. Troll qualifies him as follows:

In an age poisoned by imperial domination and fierce religious controversy and, in fact, from some years before the upheaval of 1857 onwards, he practised and advocated friendship with Christians, openness to each other's cultural heritage, and sympathetic approach in scholarly studies of each other.61

The Catholic Church in India, on the whole, was silent and inactive in the field of Christian-Muslim dialogue after the closure of the Jesuit Mission at the Mughal Court. Tipu Sultan's (1749-1799) intolerant policies towards non-Muslims and some of the atrocities committed during the Mappila rebellion in 1921 created in the minds of South Indian Christians an image of Muslim as a cruel and fanatic warrior. Fr. Victor Courtois, S.J. seems to be an exception in this field. In order to make the
Indian Church aware of the Muslim dimension of its mission, he wrote and edited, almost single-handedly, from September 1946 until his death in December 1960, *The Notes on Islam, A Bulletin of Information about Islam with Special Reference to India*. The *Notes* first appeared bi-monthly, then, from 1953 onwards, quarterly. In the opinion of Dr. Troll, the *Notes* abstained from all sorts of unpleasant controversies and tried to present the religion of Islam as objectively as possible. He always remained faithful to the objective of the *Notes*: to contribute to a better appraisement of Islamic culture. The *Notes* gained international recognition and were increasingly read by Muslims, especially in India and Pakistan.62

The Protestant missionaries in India concentrated their work among the Muslims, in the beginning of this century, through the activities of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, now situated at Hyderabad. It was founded as Henry Martyn School of Islamic studies in Lahore in 1930 with the objective of training missionaries and national evangelists to work among the Muslims. This Institute has, to a certain extent, succeeded in promoting an interest among Indian Christians to acquire an objective and sympathetic understanding of the faith and practices of their Muslim neighbours. It has certainly taken praiseworthy leadership in organizing several dialogues between Christians and Muslims on important theological issues.63

The Catholic Church was also not very inactive in this field. In response to the call given by the Second Vatican Council it held an All India Seminar in Bangalore in 1969. This Seminar
exhorted Indian Catholics to enter into sincere and serious dialogue with the great Indian religious traditions. As the first step to prepare the Christian community for dialogue with Muslims it urged "that scholars be set aside to study the Muslim religion, social life and culture in India hoping by this means to come to a better understanding of these great people." 64

Another All-India Consultation on Evangelization held in Patna (October 1973) had a special workshop under the title "Evangelization and dialogue with Muslims". Dr. Troll makes the following observations about this workshop.

For the first time, a group devoted to approaching Muslims came together. Fr. J. Wijngaards of the Mill Hill Fathers presented (in absentia) a perhaps somewhat too ambitious but nevertheless truly prophetic plan concerning a future Catholic apostolic outreach to the Muslims. The resolutions of the group were basic. The need was stressed for courses, especially in Seminaries, on Islam and on the approach to Muslims and Islam. The founding of a Catholic Institute to provide such course were recommended. 65

The Research Seminar held in Bangalore in 1974 on "Non-Biblical Scriptures" made an important statement that Islam has a positive religious message, of special significance for the Christian Church in India:

In some sense Islam in India may even be said to have been entrusted with the continuation of the O.T. task of conveying its experiences of the transcendence and majesty of God, shown so distinctively in the deep sense of reverence for God by Muslims in their prayer life. We Christians have something to learn from this attitude which may lead us to a new awareness of God's greatness and power. 66

Fr. Albert Namblaparambil C.M.I., the former Secretary of the Dialogue Commission of the C.B.C.I., has rendered yeoman service in preparing the Catholic community on all levels for dialogue. As a part of its programme the Commission has been organizing numerous
short courses on Islam in different parts of the country, covering
the basic tenets of Islam, areas of misunderstanding, of convergence
etc. The participants of these course, wherever possible, were
taken to nearby mosques to witness the prayer of the Muslims and
also for friendly and informal conversation with the religious
leaders of the community. Muslim teachers, very often, were
invited to talk to the participants. Besides these course, Fr. Albert
organized many multi-religious "get-togethers", "Live-Togethers" and
"Prayer-sessions" in different parts of the country. The commission
has published several books as guidelines for inter-religious
dialogue which include an Indian edition of the Guidelines for a
Dialogue Between Muslims and Christians of the Secretariat for
Non-Christians in Rome, with an additional chapter on the Muslims
of India prepared by Dr. Troll. Regarding the response of Muslims
to such programmes Troll writes as follows:

On being asked, many of the persons actively engaged in
initiating multi-lateral dialogue in India admit that on
the whole a sizeable and regular Muslim participation has
not been forthcoming. They attribute this partly to lack
of interest or to hesitation on the Muslim side but even
more to a lack of sympathetic knowledge, contact and sen-
sitivity towards Muslims and their religious tradition among
themselves.....Wherever informed sympathy and sensitivity
towards Muslims existed, Muslims have responded positively.67

Dr. Troll warns us that the above mentioned paragraph should
not create an impression that Indian Muslims have been solely pas-
sive partners in dialogue. As an example of Muslim initiative
for multi-religious Institute of Islamic Studies (I.I.I.S.) which
from the year of its foundation in 1963 onwards has cooperated with
the H.M.I. in organizing dialogue meetings. Similarly The Islam
and the Modern Age Society, founded by the late Dr. Abid Husayn (d.1978) in 1970 has been keeping up a strong commitment to dialogue on the intellectual level especially through its quarterly bulletin called *Islam and the Modern Age*. The I.I.I.S. Tughluqabad, was the venue of a national Seminar on "Mosque and Church – their contribution to inter-religious harmony and reconciliation". It was jointly organized in October 1978 by I.I.I.S; by H.M.I. and the Dialogue Commission of the C.B.C.I. The aim in the words of Dr. Troll "was to explore, in the light of the message of the Bible and Quran, the possibilities of a common commitment to harmony and reconciliation not only between Muslims and Christians but also among all religions and ideological groups in India." Today the activities of Catholic Church in India in the field of Islamic Studies are mainly carried out by the members of ISA, which was a gradual development of JAMI, a Jesuit Organization started in 1977 at Delhi.