

Summary of the CASIS Saturday Night Lecture by Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on 28th July 2012

The word Allah

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In the fourth lecture Professor Naquib began with a discussion on the word Allah. He informs the audience that there are some who claim that this word was already used among the pagan(jahili) Arabs.

If this claim can be verified then it is a fact which maybe misused by the confused or those with ill intentions. It maybe that they could use it to support their existing theory which claims that the term Allah went through a development,that the prophet(peace be upon him) appropriated it for the new religion.

The professor asks whether if it has indeed been used by the Jahili Arabs,was it a term whose meaning the pagans understood? Quoting the Quran, it was said that had they been asked who created the heavens and the earth, they would say 'Allah'. However we can still ask, is it a word where the full semantic field is understood? Apparently not, for inspecting the Quran we find numerous verses suggesting the pagan Arabs held erroneous beliefs which were challenged and corrected by the Quran.

At the same time, if it was granted that they knew the word, it is not something that they constructed, and to prove this, he cites the evidence of the existence of the past prophets, one of whom was Ismail the son of Ibrahim,the ancestor of the Bani Hashim.

According to the Quran, the term Allah is a proper name that Allah had revealed to the prophets. Prof. Naquib further argued,quoting Hamzah Fansuri that it is the name encompassing all names and attributes. If Allah is a proper name which He(exalted be He) ascribes to Himself, then there is no question about the term being derived from the term 'Ilah' which is added to the definite article 'Al' suppressing the i sound as some of the grammarians had claimed.

This discussion serves as a preface to his exposition of other concepts pertaining to the meaning of the religion of Islam. In particular, he discussed the meaning of submission, which is of two kinds, that which is done willingly, and that which is done grudgingly.

As for Kufr, it is described by professor Naquib as both misbelief and disbelief, the former owing to errors in the form and content of submission, the other coming from obstinacy, which was exemplified by Iblis who although fears the lord almighty, disobeys Him.

As for the former, which results from error and ignorance, it is something which can be remedied by instruction and teaching, but if ignorance is coupled with obstinacy, then no instruction can remedy such a condition.

Further, he explained that the rejection of Prophet Muhammad(pbuh) is also a form of Kufr,because that would entail rejecting God's message, as well as rejecting the authority of he who was sanctioned by God to spread the true message.

If truth regarding beliefs is affirmed, the logical consequence would be to say that some other beliefs are wrong, including other institutionalised religions. Prof Naquib recounted how there is a rising number of people who wants to equate Islam with all religions, that these groups, quoting some sufi master say that all such beliefs are lights pointing to the one true reality. But He replies, although it maybe that all are lights, not all are equal, some are dim like the stars which illumine the night of

ignorance, but when the sun rises, the stars disappears. Unlike the other religions which admit of errors in their belief, Islam does not admit of error in its central beliefs, and in contrast to other revealed religions only Islam does not tamper its understanding of Tauhid(divine unity) with Shirik(polytheism).

Further only the religion of Islam is named after its very act of submission, and this is the very meaning of religion; Submission to God. Other religions are either named after their founders, or the valley which it first sprang.