

The theology of Eckankar: Its critique and study based on the Islamic teachings

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ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with theology from the point of view of the school of Eckankar and its critique based on the Islamic teachings. Three major topics are probed into in the school of Eckankar, i.e. the definition of religion, the origin of religion, and exclusiveness. On the topic of the definition of religion, Eckankar essentially regards as a religious experience in its common sense in the western culture. Therefore religion is an experience that the individual passes in him, and observing rituals such as going to the church are not regarded as faithfulness. From the point of view of Islamic teachings such an attitude causes the reduction of the values of the epistemic role of religion, while in Islam the epistemic aspects are very strong. On the topic of the origin of religion, once again the Eckankar School regards religion as the individual's personal experiences. Therefore, based on the multiplicity of the individual's religious experiences; religions will be multiple as well. Islamic teachings regard personal experiences as based on divine nature, but does not agree with the religious multiplicity as multiplicity in the legitimacy as regarded by the Eckankar School. The concluding part of this of this paper is the topic of religious exclusiveness of which the Eckankar School is a fervent advocate, but yet there are many contradictory points in the contents of the speeches of the supporters of this school. The paper attempts at showing its ambiguous and contradictory points from the point of view of Islamic teachings, and put to the test of critique.

KEYWORDS

Eckankar, religion, the origin of religion, exclusiveness, multiplicity of religion.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 April 2017
Revised 28 April 2017
Accepted 9 May 2017

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Introduction

The word religion is among concepts the definition of which has been a field for the meeting of various and different theories and ideas on the part of scholars. Therefore, in some cases its definition comes close to the impossibly simple one. That is why Robert Hume the western thinker on this regard says that: "Religion is so simple that even an adult and wise child or even an adult person can have a real religious experience, and yet it is so comprehensive and complex that in order to fully understand and use it, there is a need for analysis." (Hume, 1379 the solar year, p., 18)

Or Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) the world-renowned author of the encyclopedia of religion writes that: "There is probably no word but "religion" which is being used so obviously and simply, but in point of fact, is an indicator approaches which are not only very different, but at times mutually exclusive." (Eliade, 1389 solar year, pp. 202)

It is quite possible that the reason for the definition of religion being impossibly simple is the fact that thinkers have regarded various sources for religion, and also the fact of the broad array of the concept of religion, so that each of the Islamic, eastern and western thinkers as defining religion, has offered a definition, and in the meantime the school of Eckankar is no exception. Following is the consideration of the definition of religion as done by Eckankar, and then we will do a critique and study of it.

2. The definition of religion in the school of Eckankar.

Paul Twitchell and as defining religion says that "Going back to religion, you might say that religion for everyone is not the church, the organized body of those following a series of concepts, but it is the inner experience of the individual. To get to this experience, one must go inside and find his way through to the spiritual world. He must detach himself from all sense objects by concentrating the attention on something inside, and suddenly he will be outside in the subjective worlds." (Paul Twitchell, 1969, p134)

2.1 Analysis and critique.

The most major critiques which can be done on the definition of religion as offered by the Eckankar can be summed up in three major critiques. 1: The definition of religion in the school of Eckankar is based on the religious experience. 2: Eckankar's allusive proposition to the revealed religions as limiting religion to the mosque and church. 3: The incompatibility of Eckankar's definition of religion with those offered by Muslim thinkers.

2.1.1. The first critique.

What has been mentioned as the definition of religion as religious experience needs scrutiny and study. Contemplating on the atmosphere governing the 18th and 19th century in the west can be of great help in understanding the reason behind issuing the theory of religious experience. Therefore it should be known that despite the critique of the discursive intellect on theology by the modern rationalism, and the emphasis on the exclusive of the reasoning mind on cognition on one hand, and on the other hand the active presence of positivism and empiricism in the fields of the western thought, and the emphasis on the use of induction instead of deduction on the other hand, has had no outcome but the devaluation of the beyond-the-mind and beyond-the-sense cognition, and the

instability of religious teachings and divine sciences. In another word, the outcome of the two mentioned thought currents were nothing but the heritage of those two currents not responding to man's instinctive needs. And this created a proper context for the advent of the theory of religious experience by Friedrich Schleiermacher(1768-1834) the German philosopher and theologian which sets the base of religion not on rational and empirical cognition, but rather on feeling, and convinced other thinkers such as Rudolf Otto(1869-1937) , William Alston (1921-2009) , and William James (1842-1910) to follow the same thought, although each one of them interpreted the religious experience with his own particular approach. Therefore, the religious experience is a topic which has made its advent based on the circumstances and situations governing the west.

In a general definition, religious experience is defined as follows: "Experience is something that the individual experiences (whether as the experiencer or the observer), and he is conscious and aware of it. For instance, the experience of world baseball games, can be both taking part in it, or attending the games, and also if we regard experience in its broad sense and with a medium, experience could be watching it on T.V or listening to it on the radio. We have a wide array of experiences, but in here we have the religious experience in mind. Religious experience is regarded different than other conventional ones, that is to say, the individual regards the bound of this experience and entity or a presence supernatural (i.e. God or his manifestation in an act), or regards Him an individual somehow in relation with God (such as God's manifestation or a character such as the virgin Mary), or regards it as an ultimate reality, a reality beyond description (like The non-dual absolute) Brahman or Nirvana." (Peterson, 1387 the solar year, pp. 36-37)

In the view of Proudfoot (1939) religious experience is the one which is regarded religious by its experiencer. Regarding an experience religion means that the experiencer believes: explaining the experience based on the natural affairs is insufficient and inadequate, and that that experience can only be explained through religious teachings and something supernatural. (Peterson, *ibid*, p50)

Of course, attention should be paid to the fact that there are different interpretations for religious experience, which are sometimes called "different kinds of religious experience". Among which is Schleiermacher and in his influential writings of the 19th century claimed that religious experience , is not a rational or epistemic experience, but rather , "The feeling of an absolute and unified dependency on a source or a distinguished power from the world. This experience is an intuitive one, the value of which subsists in God, and is independent of concepts, visions, beliefs or deeds." (*ibid*, pp 36, 41)

Due to the fact that Eckankar and in it explanation of religion believes that: "Religion is an experience that the individual experiences in himself, in order to reach this experience, the individual needs to step into his own self and realms" (Paul , Twitchell ,1969 , p190)

This seems to have a lot of similarities to the interpretation of religious experience by Schleicher; therefore, the common critique on both is as follows:

In the first place, this claim requires that religious experience be void of any epistemic aspect, since Schleiermacher believed that by resorting to this type of feelings, he can build the system of religious belief and justify it. But the question is that can feelings justify epistemic beliefs? The problem arises from the claim that God (as a transcendental Being), and our experience of God (as a feeling not made up of beliefs and concepts) are both beyond expression. While in

order for an experience to have an epistemic significance, it should be obtained and asserted through concepts and rational beliefs.

In the second place, through what standard can one discern that this experience is a divine or diabolical one? Can it be proved through feeling that this experience is a divine one?

In the third place, the utmost power of religious experience is that it can justify the experiences for the experiencer, and in order to achieve this, there is a need for the individualization and personalization of religion. That is to say, there should be religions as many individuals and experiencers there are, and that religion never steps into the field of human's social life as a social institution, and expel religion from its mission of making a society. This is admitted by Eckankar itself with which we will deal in the second criticism.

2.1.2. The second critique.

As for Eckankar attributes to the revealed religions, that for them religion is limited to the mosque and church, the least one can say is that this attribution is due to ignorance and being unaware of the universal teachings and laws of Islam, which are not limited to the mosque and attending it. The mosque and while enjoying a very high place in Islam, and has even been regarded as a place for worship, even sorting out affairs, judgment and settling people's disputes, but all of this is because the mosque is regarded as a symbol of the Islamic society and among the rituals of Muslims, and not all the historical missions of Islam. Considering the definitions mentioned earlier by Islamic scholars, it never considers religion as being limited to attending the church or mosque or other organized institutions. But rather considers attending the church or mosque as parts of religious teachings known as branches of religion. Parts of religion and its teachings are beliefs, i.e. the very beliefs based on the reason and revelation, and this cornerstone is located in the inner world of the religious man and in his heart, mind and soul. Therefore it is not that the whole of religion is in the world outside. Religion in Islam is taken from revelation, God's word and in the light of reason, and not the outcome of personal experience, but Eckankar has stated that religion is the very personal experience and the outcome of the individual being put in the heart of spiritual worlds. And it is clear that this belief equals the personalization and individualization of religion. This is to say that as the number of individuals and experiencers, there also will be religions, and religion as a social institution will never be made advent, and this means preventing religion from its human and social mission.

Eckankar admits to this consequence: "Here is the crucial point, as the methods differ, so will the experience differ. The method of the spiritual traveler is exacting. All other methods are more or less haphazard, empirical and uncertain. Because of these various methods which the many religious organizations have, the experiences in the other worlds are vastly different. Take for example on this plane; the experience of a movie actor is going to be vastly different from that of a public accountant. This is obvious."(ibid, 1969, p135)

The criticism valid to this statement is that this conclusion is illogical, and that the reality of the present religions does not verify it. If religion is the outcome of personal experience, and that personal experiences are individual, there should

be no thousands of people who follow the same religion, but rather each should have his own religion, cult and rituals.

As regards Islam, all the followers of Islamic sects have millions of things in common, and are unified and share in most of the bases and moralities. If religion consists of the experience that the individual feels within himself, this requires that the individual has taken some courses, and spend some time on transferring it. While the realities existing in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic are so that they show there have been prophets and religious leaders who were propagators of religion from a very early age of childhood. Koran mentions Jesus as saying that while no more than a baby, he says: "I am the servant of God, gave me the Book and made me a prophet and holy wherever I am." (Mary. Verses 30,31)

The fact that one of the ways to know and reach the truth is intuition and mysticism, is accepted by Islam, and is a way correct in general, but to regard it the same as revelation is totally wrong and is due to not knowing revelation.

2.1.3. The third critique

The definition provided by Eckankar is not compatible at all with the ones given by the Islamic scholars of religion. As some instances, some of these definitions are mentioned. Seyed Mortaza as defining religion says: "In the Islamic law, religion means what has been promoted by and invited to by the prophet." (Alam AL-Hoda, 1425 A.H, vol. 2, p. 270) Allame Tabatabai and in his various works, regards religion as a number of scientific and practical plans which provides for man's worldly interests to gain otherworldly perfection and man's eternal life. (Tabatabai: 1417 A.H, vol.2, pp 130,342, and ibid, vol.16, p.193)

It seems that a comprehensive definition which can be given for religion would be as follows:

It is the collection of scientific and practical knowledge which is received through revelation and the mind. It goes without saying that the above definition is appropriated for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which have been given to people through prophets, and Eckankar is outside this circle.

2.2. The origin of religion:

Form the point of view of Eckankar one of the main sources and causes for the advent of religion is the internal and personal experiences of the individual, and since experiences are different, religions are numerous.

"By leaving the outer world and entering the inner world of consciousness, the spiritual traveler finds himself. There is no exception to this rule. This is the true system of the ECK traveler, and it is true of all other systems which yield any sort of high spiritual experiences whatever. Here is the crucial point- as the methods differ, so will the experiences differ. The method of the spiritual traveler is exacting. All other methods are more or less haphazard, empirical and uncertain. Because of these various methods which the many religious organizations have, the experiences in the other worlds are vastly different. (Paul, Twitchell, 1969, p.134-5)

Although in another place Eckankar itself does not accept the idea that the origin of religion is personal experiences, and points out tens of sources as the origins of religions. The origin of religion and the purpose behind inventing it have been mentioned in various and scattered ways in Eckankar.

In a bigger picture, Eckankar, regards the origin of God's existence and the will towards Him as the effect of man's endeavor to stay in this world, and therefore, regards religion as the product of man, and regards revelation as the effect of his mind's secret discourse and not God's word. (ibid, 1998, p14, 258, and 1969, pp194-195)

In this situation, the origin of religion will become clear, and that is why there are contradictory statements.

"There is little wonder that men take to religion, even if they have to invent one. Voltaire said that religion is the solace of the weak. Nietzsche repeated this in his writings and talks. But be that as it may, the weak and the trapped need some support, and far be it from me to deny them. I wouldn't take their religions away, even if I knew full well that it could be done. "

"Religion has always been a haven for the millions who mourn and suffer. It is undeniable that that is has generally been the unhappy who have sought relief in religion; any religion which happened to be near them, and who can blame them. It's like a drowning man grasping at a straw." (ibid, 1969, 153-154)

Eckankar and after a report of ranking religions of the world which places Buddhism in the first rank, and then followed by Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. The rest of the religions are the marginal members of sects in the world, the main ones are regarded the followers of Confucius and Tao.

Regarding the causes and sources of the advent of religions over history it says: "The destruction of lives in the name of a holy being has been the bane of this earth. The fight between materialistic organizations, caking themselves religious faiths under the banner of a true God, is the worst of the conditions man has invented. No savior who came to this world intended to propagate a faith. Instead he wanted to give a few simple truths learned in the Far country, and have them passed along to those who would listen. The ancient masters followed this method. They hardly wrote anything, for none of their followers had the ability to neither read nor write. They passed the word by mouth. Once they initiated a person into a holy path which they were following, then they would turn to another. None had a clinging, social teaching as you find today in many of the organized churches. Therefore you find that religion is simply a social institution, demonstrably true of the western religions, and woven through those in the Oriental countries. Name one religion which is in existence today and I will show you that it is a product of the social conscience, instead of the Truth of the SUGMAD. All laws, which are called the law of God, are hardly anything except the evolution of the social conscience from the Law of Manu, the code of Hammurabi, the Law of Moses, and the canons of the Christian Church."

"What do they represent? Nothing more than the rules and regulations of the pries-craft to control their followers for a political and economic hold over the multitudes. Didn't Fubbi Quantz know this when he was challenged by the people in his day of open ministry?"

"What has been more hideous than the caste system established by the Law of Manu? Or the civil restrictions set by Hammurabi's Code, or the refusal implicated in the Law of Moses, or the moral issues established by the Christian canons? Restriction, restriction and restriction! This is all these social indicators give!" (ibid, 1969, p34-35)

In other places profiteers' and greedy people's misuse to reach their power-loving purposes are introduced as the origin of religion, and in other places people's folly is introduced as the preparation for such an atmosphere. And in

continuation, clergymen's role in convincing people to accept such an atmosphere is pointed out.

"This is a part of the ignorance of the priestcraft. The Christian Church, in playing its part in world history, destroyed the political power of the ancient Roman emperors and established its Pope as the leading exponent of western religious leadership. The church has held this position since its establishment over a thousand years ago. "

"It has survived schisms when other groups broke off from the mother church and tried to establish similar power; but it has always come back stronger because the Church recognizes that as long as it can control the social conscience of the Church society, it can rule. The Hindu Brahman rulers recognized this centuries ago, and as result founded the caste system in India which made them the highest of social classes. Buddha set a precedent by trying to break this system of the Brahman priests; he wanted to make all his followers Buddhists like himself, which wasn't at all possible. "

"So as usual, when Soul is implanted within the body and cannot leave, it turns to cunning and politics. Buddhism evolved into a church like Christianity and so have the Muslims, along with a hundred other esoteric groups whose leaders believed that it was easier to be ruler in religion and live off the people. Just like the politicians do! "

"You are right if you believe that I am being critical of religions, or rather, the groups of religions, philosophers and cultures which today parade themselves under the wide banners of faith. It would be ridiculous to deny this. "

"As you grow older in your observation of the peoples of this Earth world, it becomes more noticeable that stupidity is the reigning virtue. The masses are always willing to that somebody takes the responsibility of caring for them. This lack of self-dependence is brought about by the need of a father-symbol, hence the seeking out of a masculine deity, and later a feminine deity who is called the mother goddess. "

"This is the key to the religions: The need of a father, or mother godhead in order to give service and adoration in the form of worship. The priests, who discovered this in the early dawn of history on earth, encouraged the primitive tribes to obey certain rules and follow set patterns of rituals and rites. "(ibid, 1969, p36-38)

Yet in another place Eckankar regards using the economic sources of society and people as among the other causes of the advent of religions.

"However, in the lower worlds men rule by politics, and thereby with orthodox religions .Hence, religions become a system of socio-economic to control man's mind and body. Most world religions have a foundation in the economic systems of their times. Every social order since the start of man in this world has had a religion for its own followers. It has promised the glories when one dies. Suffer on earth and get the reward after death. This is the creed for keeping an exploited society quiet. It has formed consumer societies throughout history which have created wars and left man in poverty. It has destroyed the natural resources of man and formed a spiritual desert on earth." (ibid, 1999, p152)

On its emphasis on the materialistic and worldly motives behind religions, Eckankar says that: "Man will normally seek God when his struggle for survival on earth is greater, for he believes that his survival is linked with his materialistic life. It is then when his prayers for help are greatest but in vain.

He is not asking for the true survival of Soul, but only the survival of his materialistic universe. "(ibid, 1998, p153-4)

2.3. Analysis and critique:

As has already been mentioned, unfortunately many of the claims on the part of Eckankar are either mere claims and without any evidences or scientific documents, or are a series of claims adapted, which have been mentioned by some scholars, in particular western intellectuals ; although later they were answered by their colleagues and were rejected. For instance, some of these are mentioned.

In the Book, "The Foundation of Religion and Sociology" quoting from Titus Lucretius (19-55 B.C), it says: "He regards religion as an imaginative base against natural disasters, and introduces fear as the mother of gods." (Khoda Yar Mohebbi, Manoochehr, "The Foundation of Religion and Sociology", p 15) Similar to the claim by Lucretius is made by David Hume (1711-1776); he believes that primitive men turned to prayers, sacrifice and vows to reduce the wrath of gods and make them kind. And regards the worries of men about events of life as coming from fears and hopes which activate man's thoughts (Hume, David, 1356 the solar year, p38)

And in addition Sigmund Freud introduces man's fear as the reason for them to turn to religion. And says that: "Man and with wishful thinking has created the gods to reduce fear in nature, and compensate for the sufferings which have been imposed on him by the social life..... . The man lacking mental development regards theism as a shelter to protect him from natural violence." (Eric, Frume, 1359 the solar year, p22 and Alston, William, 1376 the solar year, p168)

Now the same claim has been made by Eckankar within other phrases and words but with the same meanings. Although the association as being unreal and illogical with religion has been made well-known by the name "August Comte" the French (1798-1857), but yet some others have taken and used this wrong idea for themselves. Including Paul Twitchell – as the very exact phrase has been mentioned- regards ignorance as the main cause that man turn to religion. Without a doubt those who introduce fear or ignorance as the main cause for men to turn to religion suffer a lot in terms of anthropology, and are unaware or pretend to be so in terms of the existence of the natural spirit and reason in man. Man's natural tendency to God is expressive of his divine nature.

In this regard Koran says that: "Turn thy face to religion naturally, the natural spirit on which God made all humans, there is no change in God's creation; that is the stable religion, but yet most of people do not know." (Rome/30)

In addition the Koran and in order to project man's divine nature says that in crises this divine nature will be more projected : "And when they get on the ship they call to God purifying the religion for Him, and when He saves them and takes them to the dry land, they will turn to paganism." (The Spider/65, and also see Lukman /33 and Bee /520)

In addition man's rational attitude towards God's creations and religious teachings leave no place for such an incorrect claim. One of the ways to communicate religion is man's reason.

In a saying by an Imam reason is mentioned as the interior Guide. "God has two Guides for people, the interior and exterior Guides." (Koleini, 1373 the solar year, vol1, the book "The Reason and Ignorance")

The martyr Prof. Mottahari and in response to such a claim believes that:” They have regarded the belief in God and other religious ideas as to be the same as the belief in the bad luck of the number thirteen, and then have tried to justify it, otherwise with the existence of the logical or natural factor, there is no need for such hypotheses.” (Mottahari, Mortaza, 1388 solar year, Vol.6, p905)

But the claim that “There has never been an established religion, no good book has ever been written except by going into the inner world” is so ambitious and closer to imagination than to reality. Because has Eckankar read all the books and understood them?! If it had paid attention to the comprehensiveness and completeness of the great ideas of Koran, it would have found out that it is a complete book with God’s revelation and is complete without travelling to the inside.

Koran says: “This Koran guides to the one which is the most stable.” (Night Journey/9)

Paying attention to the above statement leaves no doubt for the reader that the claim mentioned in Paul Twitchell – (the book” The Far Lands” p193) is the repetition of the claim made by Freud. But yet what can be said in the critique of Freud’s theory and following it the one by Paul Twitchell is that can one draw a general conclusion by merely stating some historical instances and examples? In another word, how can one reach definitive and assuring conclusions through imperfect inductions? And in the closed, limited atmosphere of Christianity of the middle ages?

Among the western scholars who disagreed with Freud’s opinions is Karl Gustav Yung .Although in the beginning Yung showed interest in Freud’s theories, and was among his fans, but due to disagreements which there were between them, their relationship came to an end in 1913.

Yung introduces as the origin of religion, the prototypes which exist in man’s collective unconsciousness, and these very prototypes create mythologies, religions, and philosophies which affect all nations and all human history’s courses, and distinguish each one. (Jung, , 1391 the solar year, p11)

Eckankar and in an obvious contradiction, insists on the other hand that the speeches of revealed religions, the leaders of philosophical schools.....have no validity whatever , and that are all the secretions of the mind and under the effect of Kal Niranjan. And yet on the other hand by citing the statements of Nietzsche and Volter says that the origin of religion is a solace for the weak.

This method is not proper for someone who claims to play the role of a peacemaker and the spiritual savior, so that whenever the philosophy, the philosopher or someone’s statement is on his behalf, he would accept it, otherwise would leave it out on the charge of being the whole Niranjan; although the statement by Paul Twitchell, Nietzsche and Volter (even if the quotation is true) that religion is a solace for the weak has no scientific basis to it. Although some religious leaders or some followers might have established a religion due to complexes and internal deprivations, but yet this exceptional case does not yield general conclusions to the effect that all religions and sects have the same situation, otherwise this situation would wipe out Eckankar itself as well.

Paul Twitchell’s statement could be true regarding superstitious and narcotic religions. But yet is not true in terms of the revealed religions in particular Islam, since Muslims did not turn to Islam due to the feeling of weakness, frustration and disappointment. Islam’s teachings are not all reactionary and observing the weak, but rather would awaken and activate the deprived and the

weak. Paul Twitchell claims that one of the factors and sources for religions is the thought of gaining the political and economic control of the society; and that clergymen reach their goals by offering class systems, orders and moralities which are introduced as religion and sects. And in order to prove his point, cites examples from Christianity and then Brahman and Hindu cult which through controlling the conscience of the society, offering the class system and attributing themselves to the highest classes, reached their goals.

This statement shows that Eckankar and in order to prove his points does not follow the scientific method. The existence of the evil I-ness and the thought of gaining control over people which does exist in some religious leaders do not justify a generalization to all religions. Islam has made its greatest fights against class and racial discrimination. Koran's many verses asking for fighting against the oppressors is a veracious proof for this. In addition, saints and religious leaders which were the forerunners of the fight against the tyrants of their own times, regard man's superiority in his being the most virtue following Koran. Koran says: "The most valuables of you for God are the most virtue." (The Chambers/13)

Whatever law which is made for people in Islam is obligatory for all to follow, and clergymen not only do not regard themselves as exempted from following the laws, but also as history witnesses were the forerunners of observing the laws. From the point of view of Islam ruling over people is a job and responsibility not a position, the ruler has the responsibility of the petition of the right of the oppressed and promoting justice.

2.4. Obvious contradiction:

Eckankar and through much insistence and emphasis tried to prove that the origin and roots of all religions and sects has been man himself, the mind, Kal Niranjana and the abuse on the part of clergymen, but yet it has other claims and with the same insistence and emphasis tries to prove that all sects and religions are branches and parts of Eckankar itself and have branched off from Eckankar itself, the same way as they would ultimately return to Eckankar itself.

"Therefore, we find that all ECKists, regardless of their spiritual status and nationality, are still disciples of ECKANKAR. Whether the chela is living on the physical plane or the Atma Lok (the soul plane), he never feels he is in a new world, or state. He is still under the general authority of the ECK, and the individual laws of the separate planes are to be obeyed and homage paid to their various rulers and spiritual governors. He does not feel either a citizen or an alien like a modern traveler who goes through each country as a tourist or for business." (Twitchell, 1999, p159)

"All religions, philosophies and sacred doctrines are the offspring of ECKANKAR." (ibid, p26)

"ECKANKAR is the basis foundation for all religions, philosophy and scientific works in our world today. It is closer to being in its original form, as the science of Soul Travel, than any other paths to God. However, it is neither religion, philosophy or metaphysics, for it is the ECK-Marg, meaning the path of ECKANKAR....."

"There was a corruption of the original teachings by word of mouth, and several other paths came out of this. Some of these were Shabda Yoga, Santon, Magi, Cult of Dionysus, and a few other mystery schools that are generally well-known to us. Each part of the divine knowledge schools branched off into its own

particular way as a path to God. The six great religious systems of India are only branches of the God-Vidya (God knowledge) that we call ECK. So are the religions of the West, and every continent, including Africa and Asia. A study of the “Golden Bough” by Frazer will bear out what is written here.” (ibid, 1998, p6-7)

“To a man who has achieved self and God-Realization, all religions, all philosophies, become just so many paths leading to the ECK. Through any of them, the seeker of God can reach the divine ECK, the immaculate path to the Ultimate Reality. To the man who has touched the robe of God there is no distinction of race or belief, no consciousness of nationality, and no religious difference. The ECK has cleared the away all conflicts and oppositions from his mental process.” (ibid, p32)

Now is it a great cause of surprise that Eckankar has a history of three thousand years before Christianity and has been taught in Egypt for five thousand years so that finally Polis Eckankar has promoted it in the name of Christianity! Therefore, if Christianity has an origin, that should be Eckankar! In addition, the root and origin of all religions is Eckankar. But yet the question remains that if the branches and sects of the human’s hallucinations are the mind, all Niranjana and the mental complexes, why is it that the very origins and roots are not the products of the same branches?!

As a general rule of thumb, the base of all branches and sects are originally branches themselves, as the opposite is also true.

Another important contradiction and incoherence in this discussion is the claim that which says the method of Eckankar is not a school, not a sect, not a philosophy, and not a metaphysics, but yet it is the first basis of all religions, philosophies, and even the scientific discoveries of today’s world. Wish that Eckankar would at least mention three instances where the technology of nuclear science, quantum physics and genetics branch off from Eckankar!

3. The exclusiveness of Eckankar.

In the sources and texts of Eckankar it has been repeated either directly or indirectly that the path to happiness and perfection, the path to cognition and reaching the truth and God and final salvation is through Eckankar. In here the thought of exclusiveness is followed at times indirectly and at times directly through regarding other religions and sects insufficient and null and void.

In this part the exclusive beliefs of Eckankar will be studied and put to criticism, and then in the next part in a separate chapter Eckankar’s ideas regarding other religion and sect will be studied.

In all realms and places Eckankar introduces the holy book of the leaders of Eckankar and the followers of Eckankar as being distinguished and exquisite, through a exclusive approach. And in the realm of salvation, reaching happiness and spirituality, reaching the truth and the right cognition, getting rid of Karma, transmigration, unreachable and vain wishes, and the calamities of all as being in the exclusiveness of Eckankar!

Wrapping up the statements of Eckankar regarding the topic of monopoly is summarized in some aspects.

1: Paying complements to the methods of Eckankar and the point that it is the only way and method which leads the way to the truth, happiness, spirituality, and heaven; therefore it is useless to refer to other Divine Laws and religions.

2: Paying complements to the Shariyat-ki- Sugmad and the far country and the other writings of Eckankar so much that no other religious or scholarly book is comparable to it. The only useful and helpful book to transcendental aims is the Shariyat-ki- Sugmad, and referring to other books will just cause misguidance.

3: Paying complements to Mahanta, the masters of truth and spiritual envoys so much that no one is comparable to him. So that if man follows someone else will never reach happiness, truth, salvation, heaven and..... . They are the only ones qualified and the ones having the power to show the path of truth and salvation.

4: Invocation and making fun of other religions, even philosophies and reason to fortify and prove the superiority of Eckankar.

Considering the categories above in here, the monopoly of Eckankar is divided into the direct and indirect ones, and then the direct monopoly is divided into the realms of the methods of Eckankar, Mahanta and the holy book.

A: The direct Exclusiveness.

What is meant by the direct monopoly is that without allusive proposition to other religions and schools of thought, claims monopoly which is itself shown in three ways.

1: The Exclusiveness in the methods.

In many of the statements in the sources of Eckankar, the word "method" of Eckankar and also its meanings are used as the only way available.

"Now, the purpose of all higher thought is to convert that mental concept into something that is real to experience. It is only then that the ECK traveler can have a true insight upon realization." (ibid, 1969, p 130)

"Only the great ECK travelers have had the perfect system by means of which it can be done, and the travelers have been very few among men. Efforts towards this sort of realization have always failed, except and only when they have followed the method which I've laid down here." (ibid, p132)

"No one except the ECKist can live by the laws of God. Nearly all commandments say "do right", but few know what is being said here except the Living ECK Master who gets to the heart of the problem. Most religions, instead, write down their laws in a book and assign penalties for their violations. Nearly all of them sum up the matter by saying "Do the will of God". (ibid, 1999, p69)

"One must set aside all ideas, opinions, theories and beliefs and look earnestly at the one great principle of ECK, the "I AM". The one who does this will find himself awakened by the knowledge of the divine Self, that there is no other center of the ECK than he himself. Thus he is liberated while still in the human form, before the death of the body, and before the dissolution of all worlds at the end of the Kalpa. He has reached the state of the Jivan –Mukti, liberation of Soul via sound current." (ibid, 1998, p23)

A.2: Exclusiveness in the holy book.

In the sense that the holy book of Eckankar which is the Divine Law of Key Sugmad is the only book which contains all the truth and salvation.

"No one shall reach these joyous heights of Spirit unless he has been trained in the works of ECKANAKR. A specific attitude and viewpoint is necessary for the satisfactory utilization of the spiritual powers; he who uses them must be free from emotional bias and entirely detached and serene in his attitudes. Otherwise, he will be a failure at travelling the path to God." (ibid)

3: Exclusiveness in the book of Mahanta.

“It is only Mahanta, the Living ECK Master, who can serve as the spiritual guide to lead the initiate into this world. The initiate shall enter into these high worlds in true humbleness, for insolence or arrogance which is the result of ignorance can keep the seeker away from any true spiritual unfoldment.” (ibid, 1999, p206)

“It is here that the initiate begins to attain direct conscious experience. This is something which the intellectual senses cannot give him.” (ibid, p202)

“The chela should never expect nor ask that the living ECK Master fit the image which he has formed through reading and listening to other about any pseudo-masters. All are pseudo-masters except for the living ECK Master; he is the only authentic Master within this world. Many seekers of God make their own image of what they expect a Master to be, and learning that the Mahanta does not fit this symbol they become disappointed. They look too much for gentleness and kindness and all the virtues which they believe.” (ibid, 1998, p182)

“It is not possible to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven except through the teachings of ECKANKAR. The path lies with the Mahanta and all who come to him will have salvation and liberation from worldly affairs. Unless Soul does this and follows the path of ECK with loving obedience, it is impossible for it to enter into the Ocean of Love and Mercy and become a coworker with God.” (ibid, p83)

“This is the great thing in the process- perfect concentration, becoming oblivious to the outer world of sense, centering attention upon that which is to be found in the Far Country. This is the way of attainment, no matter in what line of endeavor. No matter what one is to achieve, this is the end and only method leading to success. Concentrated attention is the key that unlocks all stores of wisdom, of truth and spirituality.” (ibid, p136)

“The ECK travelers know that the path of the ECK is the only way to reach the world of the SUGMAD. They know its dangers and blessings. Leading the blind upward along the path until they can see for themselves, the travelers find only the blessings for their followers-bypassing the dangers, always letting their companions know what might befall them if they are careless.” (p154).

“Those who listen to Mahanta and obey with love in their hearts shall find love everywhere. They shall receive the love of God and shall abide in the love of the living ECK Master.” (ibid, p108)

“Those who love the living ECK Master shall be loved by the Sugmad. In love of this nature one finds freedom, but until one learns to love the living ECK Master he is in the bonds of Kal.” (ibid)

B: The indirect exclusiveness.

This means that through falsification or demonizing the point of view of the other, you will make a monopolistic realm for yourself. This method is among one of the most common ones which can be seen in the Eckankar texts, ranging from the claim that the revealed religions belong to the time of mankind's childhood to creating stress and fear in the hearts of those who don't join Eckankar.

“This is the summing up of the whole matter. Churches, formal religions belong to the immature periods of human thought and evolution, to the childhood of the race. Each religion serves its own purpose in its own day and time. But each must eventually give way to something more complete, as mankind advances to greater spiritual understanding.” (ibid, 1969, p132)

“I will add that it is good to be born in a church, but it is bad to die there. It is good to be born a child, but bad to remain a child. Churches, ceremonies, symbols are good for children; but when a child is grown up, he must burst, either the church or himself. “

“This realization of the SUGMAD must be explained to you. Most people have no idea what one is talking about, nor do many of the writers who turn out reams on the subject have the foggiest idea of what this expression mean.”

“All the ways of liberation offered by the various orthodox religions generally must take Soul through the endless cycle of reincarnation until it becomes awakened to Its true self. But ECK gives the chela a concise way which is not known in any other Path to God. One the chela steps out on the Path of Eckankar, his karma begins to resolve and his reincarnations become less. When he is initiated, it means that never again will he have to return to this physical and material world. From the moment he stepped out upon the Path of Eck, his spiritual life is under the protection and the guidance of Mahanta, the Living ECK Master.” (ibid, 1999, p15-16)

“The mainspring of every civilization is its church. When that decays the civilization decays with it. But with the ECK, one finds no decay for ITS strength lies in the SUGMAD, and there in IT is all powerful. Because the living ECK Master is always with every civilization in history, those who follow the ECK find that it needs no human state of consciousness to guide it as religions need.” (ibid, 1998, p181)

3.1. Analysis and critique.

Without a doubt one of the most controversial religious research topics is that of exclusiveness. With the advents of any religion and school, will regard the claim to the exclusiveness of truth and salvation to be inseparable to it, whether divine or non-divine religions. As the Bible quotes from Jesus as saying that:” No one shall go to Father but by me.” (The Bible, John , chapter 14, verse 6)

In addition Hindus believe that their sacred texts, i.e. “Vedas” existed before the world and during the whole time were protected from the ones who tried to distort it and without any mistakes. (Hume, 1379 the solar year, p41)

In this doctrine there is strong monopolistic claim. However men come close to me I shall receive them, whoever chooses a path that is my way.” (Eliade, 1389 the solar year, p342)

And Buddhists regard the teachings of Gautama Buddha the only way of the salvation of man from hallucinations and misfortune. (ibid p.302)

Islam is no exception from this universality. Koran says that :” Verily this is my way the right one, so follow it and follow not the many ways , as it will mislead you , this is what He recommends.”

Among the claimers of monopoly is Paul Twitchell the founder of the Eckankar school of thought. Michael Peterson writes that:” The most important evidence that monopolists offer to prove their point is that:”” Salvation is but by God’s grace and mercy. Our personal endeavor for salvation and being saved is doomed. Therefore an adjunct to salvation is that we see where God’s salvation power lies. When we see where God really places his unique grace, it is folly to look elsewhere for salvation.” (Peterson, 1387 the solar year, p.402)

Now from among these claimers of monopoly, which one should be chosen and based on what standard?

John Hick (1922-2012) and in response to the Christian exclusiveness says the following, but yet this response includes any other kind of Christian exclusiveness as well, including the Eckankar. He says that: "This is to say that God's boundless love has determined that mankind can find salvation if a majority of them is excluded, since a majority of them have lived either before Christ or are situated beyond the boundaries of Christianity." (Hick, 1372 the solar year, p, 283)

Therefore the monopolistic Christianity has offered ways for the salvation of non-Christians as well, one of which is called the anonymous Christians, but yet Eckankar does not accept this project too. The project of universalization and religious pluralism intends to reduce religious bias and sharing salvation with all the followers of religions, but yet Eckankar as the newest method are ignorant of this strategy or deny it.

Although among the revealed religions _regardless of the distortions of some teachings_ there are many common points, and are the same in terms of the roots and essence. This is because they are of the same origin. The truth of religion is yielding to God's will. "The religion for God is Islam." (The Family of Imran/19)

But considering the fact that the process of the mission of prophets over history has been upward and evolutionary, and also considering the fact of people's talents and capabilities, God's prophets were sent out on mission. So it can be said that that religions are only different in terms of the Divine Laws, so that the followers of Moses should follow Christ by hearing his message and follow his Divine Law. In terms of Mohammad's Divine Law Koran says that: "Today I completed your religion for you and complemented your blessing for you and Am happy with Islam as your religion." (The Food/3)

With the advent of Islam it is necessary that men pursue their path of evolution and development. "This is my right path, so follow it and follow not the paths so that you will be lost." (The Cattle/153)

Prof. Mottahari by quoting the verse: "Whoever follows a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him and in the life to come he will be a loser." (The Family of Imran/85) says: "if it said that by the word "Islam" we do not mean our own religion, but rather that submission to God, the answer would be that of course "Islam" means "submission" and the religion of Islam is that of submission too; but the truth about submission is that it has had different form in different times, and in this time its form the valuable religion received by Mohammad, and necessarily the word Islam matches it and that is it. In another word, the adjunct to submitting oneself to God is submitting to His orders, and it is clear that one should follow God's last orders and His orders are the ones revealed By God." (Mottahari, 1388 the solar year, vol.1 p.277)

At the same time there have been some preparations in advance in the religion of Islam to prevent some questions and critiques that have already been cited concerning the Eckankar. This is to distinguish between the rules for the weak, the guilty, the poor, and the one not poor.

Allame Tabatabai and under the verses 97-98-99 has the following to say regarding the poor: "This verse says that being ignorant of the sciences of religion if is due to weakness and there is no way to remove it, he is not guilty before God. That is to say that God regards being ignorant of religion and preventing others from observing the rites of religion as being cruelty. And God's mercy will not include this case, but the poor who are not able to transfer or

change the situation are exceptions, and the exception is stated in way that which is not limited to the impossibility of changing the environment. This could be due to the fact that the mind did not pay attention to the truth and is therefore deprived of the truth. Therefore the fact that led him to poverty is ignorance, and it is obvious that with the ignorance he has no power over meaning, and with ignorance there is no way to guidance.” (Tabatabai, 1417 the lunar year, vol.5, p.51)

3.1.1. Inconsistency.

As was seen earlier, Eckankar claims to be the monopolist in salvation in this school, but yet in some of its sources we see a total shift in its attitudes, and gives complete support for pluralism; as Paul Twitchell says that:” Ekaz and with its independent and unbiased position challenges any mind that is conditioned by sticking to a specific idea; those who live in ECK have no personal ideas whatever , as they have not shaped their minds through any special idea and do not support itwe have nothing but ourselves, we live in the position of pure freedom.” (Paul Twitchell, 1380 the solar year pp. 88, 89)

4. Conclusion

So far it has been attempted to scrutinize carefully, and criticize fairly the subjects put forward by Eckankar. It is obvious that the very existence of critiques and problems, are in themselves the best evidence for the extreme contradictions which the school suffers. In addition to the fact that the existence of extreme contradictions in the various parts of Eckankar’s sources causes still more instability on the part of the school. In addition to the fact that the claim that the holy book of the Divine Law of Sugmad being kept in the temple of the Golden Wisdom in the legendary and spiritual city of Agam Das in the high and wild lands of Hindu causes the more of the instability of the holy book of Eckankar. (ibid, 1998, p.11, and 1999, p.7)

While Koran, the holy book of Muslims as the only holy book of Muslims is the only one which witnesses it is not a man-made book. That is to say that there is a basic difference between what Muslims think about Koran and what they think of the other holy books. This is because Muslims believe it is the word of God word by word. And opposite the Eckankar School which falsifies thinking and promotes total worshipping, one of the ways to know Koran is mediating and thinking deeply about its features and characteristics.” The sun is there to show the sun”; although there are different and various thoughts and beliefs among the interpreters of Koran in terms of the titles and features. (Zarkeshi, 1428 the lunar year, vol. 1, p.343, and Toosi, 1414 the lunar year, vol.1, p., 17)

It is to be reminded that the above subject in addition to being the method miracle_ the Prophet being illiterate_ is also eloquent, rhetoric and speech miracle as well. In here and due to the lack of enough space, only a few of Koran’s features and characteristics are mentioned.

1: Without any disagreement, Koran and while inviting to think about its verses, announces that if it were from a source other God , there would certainly have been many disagreements in it. “Do not they think in the verses of Koran? If it were from a source other than God, there would have many disagreements in it.”(Women, /82)

2: The criterion of truth.

Although in Islam the mind/reason has been introduced as the criterion and guidance to God, but yet due to its limitations and possible risks in theoretical discussions, man needs another criterion and balance without mistakes/errors. Therefore Koran says:” It is God who revealed the Book rightfully and with criterion.” (The Counsel/17)

3: Guidance.

Koran and in accordance with man’s capabilities and capacities has the responsibility of guiding him in terms of his mind and reason on one hand, and his heart and soul on the other hand. Koran says that:” And we revealed Koran to you so that you shall explain to people what has been sent to them so that they might think.” (The Bee/44)

It says also that:” We reveal of Koran what is a cure and mercy for believers.” (The Night Journey/82)

In a nut shell, the language of Koran as the eternal miracle is the only book which invites man to challenge:” If you are in a doubt about what we have revealed to our servant, bring forth a verse like it, and call your witnesses without God if you are truthful.” (The Cow/23)

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Endnote

Eckankar School was founded by Paul Twitchell in 1965 in Minnesota of America. He believes that all religions and branches of intellectualism, even divine religions have originated from Eckankar School. Issues of theology, Cosmology, anthropology, acknowledge of religion, guidology and teleology are studied in this school. Therefore we discussed to search mentioned issues during the several articles with explanatory glanced then criticism them upon the teachings of Islamic.

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