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**AN AMERICAN MISSIONARY TO ISLAM: SAMUEL  
MARINUS ZWEMER**

**Abstract**

Samuel Marinus Zwemer (1867–1952) was an American missionary who became known as the “Apostle to Islam” for his strenuous, if not always successful, evangelization efforts in Islamic countries. He attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and the New Brunswick Seminary in New Jersey. In 1889 he and a classmate founded the American Arabian Mission, which later received sponsorship from the Reformed Church, and the next year he departed for the Arabian Peninsula. He influenced subsequent generation of missionaries to the Muslim world.

Zwemer never ceased to contend for the finality of Christ. Though unusually prolific as a writer and effective in recruiting missionaries and inspiring interest in missions, particularly in the Muslim world, Zwemer saw only a few Muslims openly profess the Christian faith.

This article will look at his view of Islam and Its teachings. He believed that moving away from Islam implied progress and moving toward Islam equated regress.

**Keywords:** Samuel M. Zwemer, Islam, Missionary, Christianity, Evangelism Orientalism

**AMERİKALI BİR MİSYONER: SAMUEL MARINUS ZWEMER**

**Özet**

“İslam’ın Elçisi” lakabıyla tanınan Samuel Marinus Zwemer (12 Nisan 1867 – 2 Nisan 1952) ABD asıllı misyoner ve din bilginidir. Ailesinin teşvikiyle Hıristiyanlık dinini dönemin en iyi okullarında öğrenen Zwemer, İslam’ı da Arap ülkelerine seyahat ederek dönemin ünlü hocalarından Arapça’yı ve diğer din derslerini tedarik etmiştir. Ona göre Müslümanları Hıristiyanlık dinine kazandırmanın en kolay yolu İslam’ı ve müslümanları yakından tanımakla mümkündür. Zwemer, Arapça’ya ve İslam kültürüne vakıf olduktan sonra misyonerlik faaliyetlerinde bulunmak üzere 1890 yılından itibaren Basra ve Bahreyn başta olmak üzere Arabistan bölgesinde hizmet etmiştir. 1913-1929 yılları

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arasında da Mısır'da faaliyetlerde bulunan Zwemer Asya'da bulunan Müslüman ülkelere de gitmeyi ihmal etmemiştir.

Tüm hayatını insanları özellikle Müslümanları Hıristiyanlaştırmaya adanmış Zwemer 1929-1937 yıllarında ağırlıklı olarak Princeton Üniversitesinde Dinler Tarihi ve Misyonerlik dersleri vererek geçirmiştir. Amerikan Missionary Society (Amerikan Misyoner Cemiyeti) çatısı altında hizmet eden Zwemer'in yayımlandığı pek çok kitabı ve makaleleri bulunmaktadır. Misyonerlik adına yayınlanan The Moslem World'da otuz beş yıl boyunca yazarlık ve editörlük yapmıştır.

Kırk yıldan fazla İslam ülkelerini dolaşarak misyonerliğe hizmet eden Zwemer'in aracılığıyla sadece oniki kişi Hıristiyanlık dinine geçmiştir. Onun bıraktığı öğretiler sonraki nesillerde ve günümüzde Amerika'daki kolejlerde ve misyoner yetiştiren okullarda yoğun ilgi görmektedir. Bu makalede Zwemer'in hayatı, misyonerlik faaliyetleri ve İslam hakkındaki düşüncelerine dair genel bilgiler verilmeye çalışılmaktadır. Makalenin sonunda ise Zwemer'in yayın hayatına kazandırdığı eserlerin isimleri yayın tarihleriyle birlikte verilmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Samuel M. Zwemer, İslam, Misyonerlik, Hıristiyanlık, Evangelizm Orientalizm.

### Introduction

The early confrontation of Islam and Christianity, dating from the 7th century, led to a difficult, sometimes torturous, relationship. The expansion of the House of Islam was linked to the cultural explosion of the Arab peoples which within a century spread over the Middle East to India and westward across Africa and Spain to threaten Europe. Military clashes, economic disruption and religious domination always bring pain, rancor and resentment. For centuries the contest for lands and peoples alienated Christians and Muslims.

Christians in Europe tried to ignore Islam after the tragic failure of the Crusades. Christians under Muslim rulers struggled from their minority communions simply to survive. Islam varied between triumphant expansionism and defensive isolationism. From the Middle Ages to the Protestant Reformation, there were few efforts to heal this legacy of friction. The full implications of the life-reforming Word and Spirit working into the churches of the West at last produced an evangelical impulse to fulfill the mission mandate of Christ, and the 19th century saw the Protestants reach out towards the Muslim world.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the literature on Orientalist searches for focuses on European forms of Orientalism. Comparatively little has been written about the characteristics of American Orientalism. The latter is worth careful attention, since the United States seems obsessed with becoming the leader in a unipolar world, and some official policy circles list Islam as a new but qualified threat to that supposed inevitability.

17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> century American writings illustrates how Europeans who invaded North America believed that they were God's chosen people, that the land they were colonizing was the promised land, and that Native peoples were God-less heathen who were to be driven

<sup>2</sup> Lyle Vander Werff, "Our Muslim Neighbors: The Contribution of Samuel M. Zwemer to Christian Mission," *Missiology: An International Review*, X/2, April 1982, p. 186.

from their homes and burned.<sup>3</sup> Fuad Sha'ban points out that religiously driven settlers, Puritans in particular, imagined parallels between themselves and the wandering tribes of Israel. These early roots were bolstered by an emerging and increasingly strong, literal, and exclusive sense of a relationship with their God, who had ordained pre-United States settlers to be “a light in the West” that would shine over the rest of the world.<sup>4</sup>

In practice, manifest destiny initially meant bringing the “light” of American style Protestant Christianity to the rest of the world. Americans saw themselves as being placed in the “center of the world” by Providence in order to carry out a Divine mission, as a writer in the *American Theological Review* put it in 1859:

Indeed, radii drawn from our eastern, western, and southern shores, reach almost all Pagan, Mohammedan, and Papal lands, or rather most of them can be reached by nearly direct water communication.<sup>5</sup>

The American missionary enterprise-the vanguard of manifest destiny- required information on “barbarians,” “heathens,” “savages,” and “pagans,” and especially “Mohammedans,” “Turks,” and “Saracens.” Beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly when manifest destiny turned east as well as west, American writers took a strong interest in Islam and the Prophet. In various treatises, they dwell on the Prophet (s) as an impostor and portray Islam as a deviant Christian heresy. Some of the very few instances where this does not apply tend to romanticize the Prophet as a hero, but these views also had at bottom the intention to defeat Islam and convert Muslims to Christianity. An equally important goal of 19<sup>th</sup> century religious writings on Islam, as Sha'ban notes, was to describe the alleged depravity of Islam in order to assert the imagined purity of Christianity, a tendency inherited from Medieval European Christianity.

Americans were also motivated in their dealings with Islam and Muslims by a complex combination of Oriental fairy tales. Making use of a body of literature largely ignored by other critics of Orientalism, Sha'ban takes a particular interest in Orientalism as found in popular American literature.

Orientalism came in different shades, and its fundamental problem was not in assigning authority to texts, but in the selective reading of these texts and the interpretive frameworks which guided these readings. Moreover, the problem in Orientalism was not in noting cultural differences but in essentializing them, and then proceeding to explain these assumed differences. It should also be noted here that the use of a “historical” approach is not, by necessity, the anti-dote to Orientalism. Zwemer claimed to use such an approach in his critique of hadith, one of the two main scriptural sources in Islam; his historical critique, however, was not significantly different in its conclusions from those of Ignaz Goldziher and John Wansborough who adopted what they called a “literary criticism” of the Islamic scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*, New York: Norton, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Fuad Sha'ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America*. Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press, 1991, pp. 23-26.

<sup>5</sup> Sha'ban, *Ibid*, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> John Wansborough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004; and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the small field of Islamic studies was mostly intertwined with Semitic or Biblical studies and with missionary activities and interests in general. The leading experts on Islamic studies in the early twentieth century were missionaries who, although much more sympathetic to and informed of their subject of study than the medieval Christian polemicists, were on the whole in pursuit of similar objectives, namely to search in Islam for a truncated versions of Christianity.

In fact, European influence in the Muslim world through colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even earlier provided new scholarship on Islam. In having had a firsthand encounter of the Muslim world Missionaries were at the forefront in such ground-breaking learning. Such studies explored the formation, philosophy and sociology of the religion.<sup>7</sup> Hourani affirms that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century most of the students of Islam's understanding of the religion were limited to its scripture, its Prophet and the history of the Islamic expansion.<sup>8</sup> Such an external outlook of Islam as a religion would likely have brought limitation in the greater comprehension of the religion.

Reformed and Anglican missionaries attempted to cope with a mix of factors that frustrated even the most dedicated witnesses. Yet from these labors and lives sacrificially given in Christ's name, comes insight for a more mature Christian approach to Muslims. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Anglican and Reformed missionary effort exemplified by Samuel M. Zwemer.

#### **Samuel Marinus Zwemer (April 12, 1867 – April 2, 1952)**

Samuel Marinus Zwemer was born of Huguenot-Dutch American parents who were serious about the Calvinistic traditions of the Reformed Church in America. Samuel M. Zwemer nicknamed "The Apostle to Islam", was an American missionary, traveler, and scholar who was born on April 12 1867 in Vriesland, Michigan. His bright character became apparent from a young age; by the age of five he had learned English, Dutch and French. Similar to the biblical account of Hanna's dedication of Samuel to God, Zwemer was dedicated as a child to the work of mission by his mother.<sup>9</sup> Prayer and scripture reading were an essential part of his family life. For ministry training Zwemer joined the New Brunswick Seminary, which was part of the Reformed Church in America and was an evangelistically minded school. At the Seminary Zwemer came in contact with Dr John G. Lansing who was born in Syria of missionary parents and who had a unique first-hand experience of the Muslim world and culture.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1890s Zwemer was one of many that had purposed in taking the gospel to the Muslim world for the purpose of the 'The Evangelization of the world in this generation.'<sup>11</sup> After finishing his studies at the seminary and receiving his ordination, he travelled to Beirut along with James Cantine a fellow missionary to continue advanced study in Arabic. He learned

<sup>7</sup> Riddell, Peter G., 'Islamic Nations and Cultures' (ed.) Kelly Boyd, *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing* London: Taylor & Francis, 1999, pp. 599-00.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Christy J. Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952, p. 28; and Lewis R. Scudder III, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1939, pp. 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, New York 1900, p. 51; and Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1907, p. 222.

it despite of its difficulty as a means of engaging Muslims in the “language of the angels”.<sup>12</sup> He reflected upon the difficult nature of correct pronunciation when stating that

“Some Arabic letters cannot be transliterated into English, although certain grammars take infinite pain to accomplish the impossible. The gutturals belong to the desert and, doubtless, were borrowed from the camel when it complained of overloading. There are also one or two other letters which sorely try the patience of the beginner and in some cases remain obstinate to the end. Then the student soon learns, and the sooner the better, that Arabic is totally different hi construction from European tongues and that, ‘as far as the East is from the West...’<sup>13</sup>

He joined Lansing in Cairo for research in possible opportunity for missionary work in the Arabian Peninsula and other Muslim lands. The detailed investigations lead them to Basrah where the Mission was active for six years. It was here Zwemer met up with Amy Elizabeth Wilkes. Zwemer’s short medical training and the establishment of Hospital in Bahrain is reflective of his influence by the nineteenth-century humanitarian missionary endeavor.<sup>14</sup> Zwemer married with Amy on May 1896 in Baghdad.<sup>15</sup> Not long after this, Zwemer and Amy were sent to Bahrain to pioneer and open a mission office where he shared the gospel at every opportunity he had. This was primarily through personal evangelism and working along with American Bible Society in scripture and tracts distribution, in which he was later joined by Peter his brother. An unfortunate event overtook the Zwemer’s family when his younger brother Peter died in 1898. Zwemer and Amy’s two daughters died in 1904 while in the mission field. In 1905 he was appointed as secretary of the reformed Board of Foreign Missions and representative spokesperson for new recruits of the Student Volunteer Movement. Zwemer more than any other man called the Church seriously to preach the Gospel in the most difficult and unrewarding field of all-the Moslem world. In Arabia and Egypt, as well as in travels over the length and breadth of the Mohammedan world, he was the blazing herald of the Gospel as well as keeping this field before the Church in Europe and America.<sup>16</sup>

In the following years, Zwemer travelled regularly to Egypt and Persian Gulf in order to teach at the Presbyterian Seminary. In 1929 Zwemer took the position of Professor of Missions in Princeton Theological Seminary. This job was a great opportunity in seeing to pass his greatest passion in life: recruiting workers for overseas mission. At the age of seventy-one he retired from the seminary. In 1937 his wife Amy, his missionary partner and comforter passed away unexpectedly. Having been introduced to Margaret Clarke, some years later Zwemer remarried. One of the annual prayer conference held in Slavanka, England on June 1948 and Zwemer wrote a letter in reflecting on his life and he said that:

“Greetings to the Saints at Siavanka:

How memory brings back the occasions when we met together, and the happy hours spent in prayer and Christian fellowship. I am now in my 81st year and have spent sixty years thinking of the Moslem World and its problems t It began when I signed a card in 1886 expressing the purpose to become a foreign missionary! Little did I realize all the

<sup>12</sup> Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Zwemer, *Ibid*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>14</sup> Zwemer, *Ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> Zwemer, *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, p. 13.

way God would lead me into Arabia and Egypt and across the world of Islam, and guide my pen to call out others,

'With mercy and with judgment

My web of time He wove

And aye the dews of sorrow

Were lustered by His love.'

Never have I regretted choosing a hard field and an impossible task. How much has changed for the better, and how many doors have opened in Arabia since 1890, and in all Asia and Africa. God's providence has been so visible that all may see His purpose. We must not lose faith or courage, but be earnest and steadfast and diligent until the going down of our sun - or the rising of His Sun at His glorious appearing."<sup>17</sup>

Zwemer was active with the Inter-Varsity Student Foreign Missions Fellowship Convention (Toronto) from its beginning in 1946 – which finds its genesis from the Student Volunteer Conventions, which Zwemer has contributed a great deal. Throughout his life, Samuel would remain an advocate for missions work in the Muslim world. The year before he died, he was scheduled to attend Urbana '51 as a Special Guest, but was unable to due to illness. In April 2, 1952, Zwemer died in New York City at few days before he turned eighty-five.

#### **Zwemer's Understanding of Islam and Its Teachings**

Islam and Christianity are the two main missionary religions in the world. From the time of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, Muslims encountered Christianity from a position of authority and strength. As Muslims conquered vast Christian territories from the seventh century, there came moments of intellectual discussions on matters of religious truth between Muslims and Christians. This pattern can be traced from Muhammad's discussion with a group of Christians from Najran in 630, to discussions between Christian clergymen and Muslim rulers in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century. Some missionaries are known for their great fruit, their many converts, churches they started, or hospitals they helped build. Samuel Zwemer is not known for these things. After 38 years of missions work throughout Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Egypt and Asia Minor, Samuel had seen his efforts produce fewer than 12 conversions to Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant missionaries to Muslims have greatly influenced Zwemer. Among them are Henry Martyn, William Muir, Thomas Valpy French, and Raymond Lull. The church must study those to whom it is sent. When Zwerner accepted the call to serve in Cairo (1912-1928) and he made it a center for Islamics, for production of literature and for interdenominational cooperation with Presbyterian, Anglican and independent presses. He also taught at the Presbyterian Seminary and the Center for Oriental Studies. His editorial staff and list of contributors included eminent Islamic scholars such as Arthur Jeffery, D. B. MacDonald, Tor Andrae (Sweden), Alfred Neilsen (Denmark), Julius Richter (Germany), converts from Islam such as Mikhail Mansoor, plus contacts at the famous university of Al-Azhar.<sup>19</sup>

Two stages in Zwemer's developing understanding of Islam are observable. Early in his career (1890-1916) he reflected the legacy of 19<sup>th</sup> century missiologists that pitted Christianity

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, pp. 240-241.

<sup>18</sup> <https://urbana.org/go-and-do/missionary-biographies/faithful-hero> (06/10/2013)

<sup>19</sup> Werff, "Our Muslim Neighbors: The Contribution of Samuel M. Zwemer to Christian Mission," p. 190.



over against non-Christian systems. The goal of “radical displacement” is seen in *The Disintegration of Islam* (1915) and *Mohammed or Christ* (1916). Later (1916-1938) a second approach appears which was more anthropological and Christocentric. Without compromising his critique of Islam as a system, he wrote empathetically of the Muslim as a person seeking after God. Islam is an attempt to solve life's problems and includes partial truths which find fulfillment in Christ. The hungers and aspirations expressed in Muslim devotional life can be satisfied in Jesus.

Zwemer's studies in popular Islam (the practices of the person on the street and in the village), Al-Ghazali, and Sufi mysticism prompted a change in his vocabulary. Field studies must supplement the historical-literary treatments of Islam by Western scholars if the church is to attune its message to those it professes to love.

While appreciative of Muhammad's effort to bring reform in Arabia and to restore Hanifism (Abrahamic religion), Zwemer faults him for neglecting the seriousness of sin. In many ways Muhammad neglected the new avenue opened to God by the incarnation and reverted to a natural theology. Foreshadowing Karl Barth and Hendrik Kraemer, Zwemer insisted God's Word in Christ remains the unsurpassed measure of all religions. Working with the Hadiths and traditional commentaries, he cites Islam as too deistic in its portrayal of God.<sup>20</sup> Allah is viewed as absolute power impervious to human petition lest his eternal essence be polluted. As a Calvinist, Zwemer respected the ideas of divine sovereignty and predestination, but Islam lacked knowledge of God as the father whose sacrificing love touches human life.

Preparation for missionary work included the study of the religion Muslims follow, through books and anthropological reflection. Zwemer found it foundational to separate Islam the religion from Muslims the people. He was aware of the taboo nature of the topic of Prophet Muhammad and the Quran for Muslims. For such a reason, he advised that

The Mohammed of tradition occupies the very highest place in their system of dogma and ethics. He has been for thirteen centuries the cynosure of Islam, the last of Allah's messengers, the final and complete channel of divine revelation. His sinlessness has become an article of orthodox belief and his power of intercession is a ray of hope for the day of doom.

But where Moslems feel so deeply we must move with caution and speak with sympathy... To the Moslems, everywhere, Mohammed is still the viceregent of God, the being who existed before Adam and descended to this earthly sphere as the Light which illumines all the prophets and even Jesus Himself! For them the Arabian Prophet is the perfect man, the ideal of conduct, the paragon of character, the hope of salvation.<sup>21</sup>

Zwemer's view of Muslims, it is clear that he has adopted a ‘confrontational approach’ in his engagement with the religion of Islam believing that there is no continuity between Islam and Christianity. Moreover, Zwemer viewed Islam as an oppressive religion especially to women and children, not paralleled by other religious traditions. He added that the Islamic law of divorce was a corrupting influence on children growing up in such an environment and led to

<sup>20</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God: An Essay on the Character and Attributes of Allah According to the Koran and the Orthodox Tradition*, New York: American Tract Society, 1905.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Cross Above The Crescent*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941, pp. 59-60.

the denigration of the sanctity of marriage. The solution, as he put it, is the gospel of Christ which brings a transformation for those who encounter it. He said that

There is the claim of womanhood and childhood. No religion has dealt more harshly and unjustly with them. The Mohammedan conception of women has degraded woman as she has been degraded by no other religion of the world, and the Mohammedan doctrine of divorce has, of course, poisoned the life of children. The great majority of humanity is made up of women and children, and upon these Islam has borne down with heaviest depression. Our women missionaries have seen something of the extent of this need, and have felt the burden of these suffering women and children, but so far we have only reached a small percentage of the population, and the call is louder than ever for women missionaries to bring love and joy and peace into Arabian society by bringing Christ.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to point out that, Zwemer's made a clear distinction between Islam and its followers; while on the one hand he rejected the religion on the other hand he welcomed and showed warmth to Muslims.

Zwemer's all-encompassing vision of God was the driving force of his missiology: 'The chief end of missions is not the salvation of men but the glory of God.'<sup>23</sup> He sees this grand vision as coming directly from Calvin: 'God has created the entire world that it should be the theater of his glory by the spread of his Gospel.' It was this unshakable belief in the infinite power and supremacy of God that drove Zwemer to the 'cradle of Islam' as a demonstration of the 'Glory of the Impossible'.<sup>24</sup> His confidence of the victory of the Gospel in the Middle East was equally unshakable. Still, this missiology of victory is fundamentally shaped by the cross: 'Christ is a conqueror whose victories have always been won through loss and humiliation and suffering.'<sup>25</sup> Dr. Lyle V. Werff describes Zwemer's missiological approach as 'Christocentric-anthropological', that is, the Gospel message is the greatest need of the Muslim as opposed to Western Civilization or 'philanthropic programs of education'.<sup>26</sup> Zwemer summarizes his theology of mission: 'With God's sovereignty as basis, God's glory as goal, and God's will as motive, the missionary enterprise today can face the most difficult of all missionary tasks—the evangelization of the Moslem world.'<sup>27</sup>

As a Calvinist and one who upheld the authority of scripture Zwemer was practically in agreement with the protestant view of world evangelism as the fulfillment of the great commission. He believed that there was no salvation found in Islam, and that Muslims should turn to Christianity. Zwemer by no means held a liberal theology but rather was critical of work that denied the heart of the Christian truth such as the nature of the atonement and the divinity of Christ. He upheld the conviction that while undertaking missionary work among Muslims one should not shy away from such a doctrine but rather put it at the forefront of one's

<sup>22</sup> Zwemer, *The Golden Milestone*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *Thinking Missions with Christ*, London: Marshall, Organ & Scott, 1934, p. 67.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, 'The Glory of the Impossible', in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, (4th Edition; ed. Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, 1911; Pasadena: Paternoster, 2009), p. 329.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, 'A Call to Prayer' in *Islam and the Cross* (ed. Roger S. Greenway; 1923; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> Lyle Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record*, South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1977, pp. 235, 236, 243, 249; and Samuel M. Zwemer, 'Our Evangel and Islam', *The Moslem World*, 26/2 (1936), p. 112.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, 'Calvinism and the Missionary Enterprise', *Theology Today*, 7:2 (1950), p. 214.



proclamation of the gospel. It is on such basis Zwemer warns of the error to those not grounded in an in-depth understanding of Christian truth, since they could easily mistake Islam as a simple deviation as Muslim searchers of the truth. His outlook towards Muslims is reflected by George Fry who asserts that despite the resistance of Muslims to missionary work, such an endeavor should be carried out since only through faith in Christ's atoning work could they obtain salvation to eternal life.<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Zwemer is concerning what missionaries are called to do: His goal is to provide the reader with an overview of these developments and deliver a fresh, biblical reframing of our understanding of mission. He thematically take up the central questions of mission and examine them from a biblical, historical, and contemporary perspective, taking into account current developments at both the local and the global levels. He held such a view in a context where humanitarian work played a vital part in 19<sup>th</sup> century mission work and believed that the preaching of the gospel and social transformation were united.<sup>29</sup> In light of the fact that missionaries voyaged on the same ships as used by explorers, civil servants and soldiers, their overall aim was different.

We have seen that Zwemer's view of Islam was in general similar to his contemporary missionaries. However, contrary to the status quo Zwemer warned that the only route Muslims would follow is not limited to a progressive route but rather a radical one. On the one hand, at the heart of Christian mission to Muslims lies the conversion to Christianity. On the other hand, radical Muslims aimed to implement the death penalty for those who leave Islam. Hence, he warned the church of such a perpetual danger. As a result, Zwemer found missionary work in the Muslim world a difficult undertaking. He viewed the main cause for such challenge to be Islamic law, which sanctioned the death sentence to Muslim converts. Zwemer came across such problems earlier in his work in Arabia. Zwemer lived and breathed 'mission' as is evidenced in his life commitment to Muslim evangelism. His pietist upbringing and conservative seminary training had been a significant factor in shaping his views regarding non-Christian religions. Zwemer's view of Islam and his missionary undertakings to Muslims had been moulded greatly by missionaries, Orientalists and Islamic scholars.

### **Books by Samuel Zwemer**

His prolific pen produced at a steady pace out of the conviction that the printed pages were "leaves for the healing of the nations." For 36 years he edited *The Moslem World* to which he personally contributed over a hundred articles based on his field experience and research. It remains an encyclopedia of cultural anthropology. In addition, his prodigious output included over 50 books in: English, six in Arabic, 24 tracts for Muslims, numerous surveys and works coauthored with others.<sup>30</sup> His most scholarly efforts treat historical and popular Islam. Zwemer sought to understand the cultural phenomena which would make for more effective transmission of the gospel.

*Arabia: The Cradle of Islam*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1900.

<sup>28</sup> John Mark Terry, *A Suggested Approach to Sunni Muslims*, Paper presented at the Southeastern Regional [ETS meeting], Charlotte, NC, March 10-11, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss with Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2010, p.vii.

<sup>30</sup> Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record*, pp. 291-295.

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