

## The Study of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's Viewpoint on the Problem of Religious Diversity

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### Abstract

The issue of religious diversity, the religious truth and salvation of the followers of religions is one of the important issues of religious studies, especially philosophy of religion. On this issue there are three viewpoints: religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism and religious pluralism. This study reviews Cantwell Smith's viewpoint about the issue of religious diversity.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) is one of the contemporary scholars in religious studies and one of the thinkers of the twentieth century with extensive knowledge in various fields of the humanities. He is one of the best historians of the twentieth century in the comparative study of religion.

The Study of Cantwell Smith's works and his views on religious diversity show that he is follower of religious pluralism. Smith's life, personal beliefs and communication with people of other faiths is an influential factor in shaping his pluralistic vision. His experience with other religions, kept him from general thinking about the other religions, and he gradually came to the conclusion that they are not unsaved and without God; but their lives, just like Christians, has religious features and traits.

Type of his communication and administrative and social activities in convergence Christian sects and followers of different religions, reflects his pluralistic spirit and thought.

According to Smith's personal approach in religious studies, his emphasis on the distinction between internal and external aspects of religion, emphasizing on the inner aspect of religion, i.e. faith, personal faith and incapacity of others in approve or reject faith, his pluralistic view can be inferred. According to Smith, the study of religion is to investigate the meaning of the appearances of religion in the eyes of those who believe in it, study people's faith and survey persons, not study data.

Smith believes that the concepts of faith and cumulative tradition should be used instead of the word religion. For him, faith is a personal experience or personal connection with the transcendent. The materials and visible subjects of religion are cumulative tradition. Faith is unique; but since faith has no form, except when expressed in certain forms, it is always diverse and varied. He likens faith to love. Love can be expressed in various forms in words and behavior and is at the heart of people and beyond these expressions.

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Cantwell Smith explicitly denies the theory of one true religion and believes in plurality of true religion. He also believes in the oneness of God (or the absolute reality) and denies the unbreakable bond between God and religion.

Smith's view about the truth and salvation of other religions is also pluralistic. According to Smith, the truth of religion is the quality of one's faith. He believes that the saving truth is in all religious traditions and in every person with pure faith. According to him, all the words, actions, rituals and religious principles are tools pushing people to the sublime. He is opposed to religious exclusivism and put it in conflict with the Christian teachings.

Smith also rejects religious inclusivism and believes that no religious tradition can fully know God. He argued that the salvation is in "human heart" and is obtained with "nostalgia and the love of God". In Smith's view, God can be known partially and there is no complete and definitive knowledge about God.

Another Cantwell Smith's ideas, is "the unity of humankind's religious history", from which the equality of all religions or religious pluralism is inferred. The context of this unique historic process is one reality of faith and beyond this, is one God or the transcendent. The theory of the unity of humankind's religious history indicates equality of different religious traditions that shape this history.

Smith accepts the reality of religious diversity, and never says different religions are the same. He says that different religions (i.e. forms and manifestations of faith) historically linked together. In other words, religious history is unique; because different forms and expressions of faith around the world are linked together. The truth of all religions (i.e. the faith) is the same and the difference is in the cumulative tradition and all religions are equal in truth and salvation.

As a result, Cantwell Smith based on the definition of religion, is a religious pluralist in religious truth and salvation.

**Keywords:** Cantwell Smith, Religious Diversity, Pluralism, Faith, Cumulative Tradition

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