

Zulfiqar Ali Shah holds a Ph.D. in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Wales, UK and an M.A. (Hons) in Islamic Studies with specialization in Comparative Religions from the International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. He has taught at both the latter university as well as the University of Wales and the University of North Florida and is proficient in five languages including English, Arabic, and Urdu. Dr. Shah has been actively involved in interfaith and intra-faith dialogue for over 25 years and has served multiple Muslim communities in North America as their religious director and a number of Muslim organizations such as ICNA as their national president. Currently Secretary General of the Fiqh Council of North America and Religious Director of the Islamic Society of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Dr. Shah is a renowned speaker invited internationally to speak on comparative religion, theology, Islam, the Qur'an, Hadith, comparative Fiqh (Law), mysticism, Islamic civilization, the Abrahamic religions and contemporary issues. He is the author of a number of scholarly articles and books including *Astronomical Calculations and Ramadan: A Fiqhi Discourse*.

This monumental study examines issues of anthropomorphism in the three Abrahamic Faiths, as viewed through the texts of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'an. Throughout history Christianity and Judaism have tried to make sense of God. While juxtaposing the Islamic position against this, the author addresses the Judeo-Christian worldview and how each has chosen to framework its encounter with God, to what extent this has been the result of actual scripture and to what extent the product of theological debate, or church decrees of later centuries and absorption of Hellenistic philosophy. Shah also examines Islam's heavily anti-anthropomorphic stance and Islamic theological discourse on *Tawhid* as well as the Ninety-Nine Names of God and what these have meant in relation to Muslim understanding of God and His attributes. Describing how these became the touchstone of Muslim discourse with Judaism and Christianity he critiques theological statements and perspectives that came to dilute if not counter strict monotheism. As secularism debates whether God is dead, the issue of anthropomorphism has become of immense importance. The quest for God, especially in this day and age, is partly one of *intellectual* longing. To Shah, anthropomorphic concepts and corporeal depictions of the Divine are perhaps among the leading factors of modern atheism. As such he ultimately draws the conclusion that the postmodern longing for God will not be quenched by pre-modern anthropomorphic and corporeal concepts of the Divine which have simply brought God down to this cosmos, with a precise historical function and a specified location, reducing the intellectual and spiritual force of what God is and represents, causing the soul to detract from a sense of the sacred and thereby belief in Him.

Khaled Abou El Fadl, Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Professor of Law, Chair of Islamic Studies Program, UCLA School of Law

I am in awe of Zulfiqar Shah's work! His exposition on anthropomorphism and transcendence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is not only learned, rigorous, and erudite, but also profound and inspiring. Every student of comparative religion, and every person of faith ought to read and reflect upon this book. I for one after completing this book, feel compelled to read it again. And this time with greater relish.

The Most Reverend Richard J. Sklba, Vicar General/Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Rarely has the precise point of debate between Islam and Christianity been so carefully and extensively articulated. Ali Shah has studied the classic Christian theological sources of Scripture and the early Church Councils in order to sharpen his comprehension of the key areas for mutual understanding and radical disagreement between these two major world religious traditions. This is a profound work. His thesis is simply that Christianity's conviction regarding Jesus the Christ as incarnate Logos, divine Person and perfect Image of the Father renders the God of Christianity as essentially corporeal. It remains a conclusion which in his judgment cannot be logically overcome, even though Catholic Christianity has long struggled with its tension between the final triumph of the Risen Christ, the sacramental system of God at work in the world and the apophatic approach of the holy mystics. Shah's work now awaits a similar study of equal erudition from the Christian perspective in order to bring the points of legitimate disagreement, especially in areas of Christology, to the table of fruitful theological interreligious dialogue.

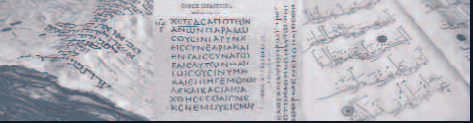
Elliot R. Wolfson, Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University

Zulfiqar Ali Shah's study is an honest assessment of one of the most perplexing shadows of monotheism as it has expressed itself in the history of the three Abrahamic faiths. The author painstakingly examines the anthropomorphic depictions of God in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptural traditions. He correctly notes that at the textual level the Qur'an is the most consistently and severely anti-anthropomorphic, upholding a more rigorous notion of divine transcendence. Beyond the historical value of this book as an exegetical work of comparative religion, it can be read as an important theological composition. The tension between a God who is wholly other and thus resistant to any human characterization, on one hand, and the basic psychological need on the part of human beings to portray God anthropomorphically, on the other hand, continues to be at the heart of religious faith and devotion. God may be without image, but in the absence of image it is hard to imagine how to worship God. In that respect, if monotheism is to persist as a vibrant force, there must always be an idolatrous element expressed in the anthropomorphic representation of the deity. And yet precisely because this is so, we must always refine our beliefs so that we are not ensnared in representing the unrepresentable and imaging the imageless by the fabrication of images that, literally speaking, are false. Rather than expanding the analogical imagination in envisioning transcendence, the spiritual demand of the hour, the epochal duty, is the need to overcome it.



Cover images from left: Hebrew Pentateuch, Greek Bible, Holy Qur'an
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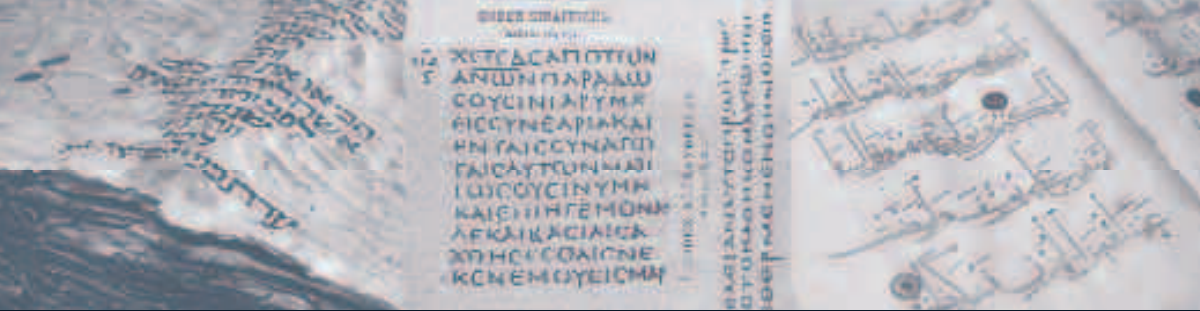
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TO MY LATE PARENTS: RAZIA AND ABBAS SHAH

May Allah SWT grant them Jannah

AND TO HAMMAD, SUMAYYAH AND SOHAIB

Hoping that they continue searching for meanings

ANTHROPOMORPHIC DEPICTIONS *of* GOD



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ZULFIQAR ALI SHAH



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