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are not virtues in Islam but *dalāl* (misguidance). Islam stands squarely within the Mesopotamian religious tradition where religion is civilization and civilization is religion.

**Finally, *tawhīd* restores to man a dignity which some religions have denied by their representation of him as ‘fallen’, as existentially miserable.** By calling him to exercise his God-given prerogatives, Islamic *da‘wah* rehabilitates him and reestablishes his sanity, innocence and dignity. His moral vocation is the p. 135 road to his *falāh*. Certainly the Muslim is called to a new theocentrism; but it is one in which man’s cosmic dignity is applauded by Allah and His Angels. Christianity calls man to respond with faith to the salvific act of God and seeks to rehabilitate man by convincing him that it is he for whom God has shed his own blood. Man, it asserts, is certainly great because he is God’s partner whom God would not allow to destroy himself. This is indeed greatness, but it is the greatness of a helpless puppet. Islam understands itself as man’s assumption of his cosmic role as the one for whose sake creation was created. He is its innocent, perfect and moral master; and every part of it is *his* to have and to enjoy. He is called to obey, i.e. to fulfil the will of Allah. But this fulfilment is in and of space and time precisely because Allah is the source of space and time and the moral law.

Man, as Islam defines him, is not an object of salvation, but its subject. Through his agency alone the moral part, which is the higher part of the will of God, enters, and is fulfilled in, creation. In a sense, therefore, man is God’s partner, but a partner worthy of God because he is trustworthy as His *khali‘fa*, not because he is pitifully helpless and needs to be ‘saved’.

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## A Christian among Muslims

Bishop Kenneth Cragg

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When Paul, in [Romans 5:8](#) tells his readers that God commends his love to us in that Christ died for us, he uses a very intriguing Greek word *sunistemi*. It means to cause to consist, ‘to substantiate’. In Christ and his death for us sinners the love of God presents its credentials, evidences its true nature. From this follows the old translation: ‘God commends’. In all commendation there is a search for recognition but a search based on the belief that what is made evident reaches into a capacity to be recognized which the other party is felt to possess. Credentials, by definition, are always this way. What they offer is related to what can reciprocate. To ‘commend’ is not only to authenticate but to expect. The truth has to find its acknowledgement in the other’s consent. It is looking for that in the other party which can be its ally in receiving it.

All this is very central to the business of witness. God does not ‘impose his love upon us’. Nor does he dictate it. ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock.’ This is the divine pattern. For only the free can be the faithful. So there is no place for ‘imposition’ in the trust of the

gospel or for 'infallibles' which are not presented freely to the mind and will. Truth can 'require' recognition only in terms of its own integrity and these include the dignity of the hearer. 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' is a very fair question but it also reverses into 'How shall they preach without a hearer?' For 'preaching' is not declaiming into the void. Nor is it in that sense merely proclaiming like a town crier 'lifting up his voice in the streets'. It is the quest for and into the other's heart.

This would seem to mean in turn that anyone's quest for the other mind and heart needs to understand where the quest is going as well as what is being taken in it. And, as a realist has written: 'The beginning of an acquaintance whether with [p. 137](#) persons or things is to get a definite outline for our ignorance.'

Such reflections are specially apposite in the Christian quest for the Muslim mind because Islam has long suffered from a sense of 'enmity-relations' with the church and with 'the West'. The reasons are not hard to identify. When Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* ponders going through the earth and coming out in Australasia she refers, with a slip of the tongue, to the folk there as 'the people of the antipathies', meaning 'the Antipodes'. Church and mosque have long been seemingly 'people of the antipathies'. Christians have resented the degree to which the Muslim Qur'an disallows the central truths of 'God in Christ', of 'the Word made flesh' and Jesus crucified. Islamic conquest displaced Christianity across wide areas of North Africa and penetrated western Europe almost as far as Paris. When later the 'Moors' were evicted from Spain, western Europe developed the idea that a similar eviction should be attempted also in the 'Christian' east—a task which, in the papal view, the eastern Orthodox had failed to do. Hence the Crusades with their long legacy of alienation.

In the demise of the Ottoman Empire, many Muslims have seen a perpetuation of the Crusades in the forms of western penetration—political, imperial, commercial and intellectual. An influential Persian book in the seventies, *Gharbzadegi*, excoriated this malign western influence under the imagery of the plague. Iranian society was suffering from 'Westitis', analogous to 'neuritis' or any other noxious disease. Hence the aura of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Islamic mentality is 'much offended' by what it sees as the (false) image-making of the western media. Even scholarship in the West is implicated. Edward Said's *Orientalism* presents a picture of a totally politicized western 'Islamicism' funded by the CIA or in other ways dishonest and unworthy. Muslim scholars are found trying to attain a purely Islamic sociology, indeed 'an Islamicization of all knowledge' so that Muslims in higher education may be preserved from the vagaries of western secularism. In this mood they do not realize that there is no Islamic aeronautics, just as there is no Christian geometry in any exclusifying sense. Yet the will to face the neutrality, religiously, of the several sciences is hard to attain in the stress of emotional self-preservation.

A right reaction to these 'facts of the psyche' is not just to try to qualify them by argument but rather to recognize their nature and see how, mutually, they might be mitigated in the will to achieve genuine engagement with each other. Certainly, for Christians, they point to that 'meekness and gentleness of Christ' of which Paul often spoke as something his hearers would at once appreciate and emulate.

All this makes it imperative to identify and recruit all that within Islam which can avail in the commendation of 'God in Christ'. It is important for Christians to enter into the Qur'an's world. We can do so without finalizing the issues of authority or its status as a 'scripture' but simply on the ground of its being where Muslims themselves begin and end. By and large historically, [p. 138](#) the Qur'an has been dis-esteemed by Christians. We have failed, for example, to realize its celebration of the magnanimity of God in the natural order, the bounty of creation delivered into the responsible custody of man as the 'caliph' or 'dominion-holder' (as in [Genesis 1](#) & [2](#)) of the good earth. If we rejoiced with the

psalmist in 'the heavens declaring the glory of God' or in the majestic sun 'as a giant running his course' there is no reason why we should not also do the same when the Qur'an echoes these strains of praise and worship.

The doctrine of man as in a sacramental order of things, in which sexuality, procreation, the techniques of science, the arts of agriculture are all occasions of divine beneficence and trust is not less true for being Quranic than for being biblical. These common territories are precious and vital. They are the arena of what the Qur'an calls 'the signs of God' meant for our reverent perception and our responsible custody.

Such rapport with the insights of Islam, insofar as we can truly share them, is the best way into the vexed questions which deeply divide us. For we truly reach these only within the context of faith in the reality of God, the divine unity and sovereignty and the dignity and destiny of man. Broadly Islam teaches that man is capable of achieving his true being under the aegis of Islamic revelation. To know is to do. Prophethood, and Muhammad's most of all, informs and guides. Thus 'ignorance', the worst foe, is overcome. To know is to do, the more so if we are disciplined by the habit of daily prayer, annual fast, annual pilgrimage, and by the social responsibility inculcated in the duty of alms (*Zakat*). All these, further, are sustained by the enormous solidarity which Islam represents and by the organ of the political state which in varying forms Islam has always seen as indispensable to the 'good' of man. These prescripts of 'salvation'—revelation, habituation, solidarity, statehood—achieve the human good. Islam to that extent is optimistic, refusing the deeper Christian perception of the sinfulness which, in man, can know well enough and not do, which can 'hate the good and love the evil'.

So we commend a gospel of divine love which moves beyond prophethood into incarnate grace and does so in response to what is known to be a deeper tragedy of human despair and guilt. It is here that the crucial witness belongs concerning 'God in Christ reconciling the world ...' Here we understand what Paul called 'the necessity of the cross' and the 'glory of the gospel'. But the Muslim sense, already present, that humanity was meant for obedience to God has to be our ally in 'commending' how God pursues those divine ends on the 'givens' of human lostness as history makes it plain.

In that 'commendation' the understanding of the person of Jesus is paramount. Muslims understand him as no more than a prophet, a faithful messenger who corrected what was astray in the perceptions of his own Jewish people. Christianity has 'Hellenized' Jesus into the Christology of e.g. the Nicene Creed and the Council of Chalcedon. Islam 're-Semiticizes' him and does not allow p. 139 him to be veritably crucified. In some sense the death of Jesus at the cross was 'only apparent', not real. (Surah 4.157) Jesus was vindicated from would-be crucifiers by being raptured to heaven. There are elements of the heresy 'docetism' in this account but it arises from Muslim confidence that God acts in power on behalf of his 'anointed ones' and could never be party to the kind of humiliation of them explicit in crucifixion. Moreover, divine forgiveness being effortless needs no redeeming intervention. The cross of Jesus is thus non-historical, unnecessary and, as Christians interpret it, essentially immoral.

All these are massive tasks for patient 'commendation'. Perhaps we can begin, however, from the same sense with which we agreed with Paul, namely of seeking that which can 'substantiate' what we bring from what is already there with the other party. In all prophethood a personality is present as more than a mere utterance of words. The question of hearers: 'What is he saying?' inevitably deepens into: 'Who is he anyway?' It was emphatically so with Muhammad into the Qur'an. Moreover, how the prophet responds to the world he addresses—its hostilities, its reckoning—perceptibly enters into his significance. This reality is at the heart of the Christian understanding of the Incarnation. 'Truth is not only *by* but *in* personality.' 'The Word is made flesh.' Addressing humanity, it

is in the human that God does so. There is a clue in prophethood itself to the meaning of 'God incarnate'. What has to be said lives a human life. 'That which we have seen' is 'the Word of life'.

Nor need we think of the Christevent (as Muslims do) as somehow derogatory to God. It is only by his own will that it brings him into limitation and humility, just as it is the very authority of the shepherd that takes him to the wilderness. He is not disqualified by being there; he would be disqualified if he were not—the sheep being out there. And self-expenditure is always the prerogative as well as the nature of love.

Our Christian 'commendation' of Christ crucified is the same. The Muslim mind is urgent about 'vindication' of messengers. They should be seen to succeed in what the Qur'an often calls 'manifest victory'. But what is really 'victorious'—the love that suffers or the power that intervenes to frustrate the evildoers? In the latter case their enmity is never 'borne' never taken away, never 'forgiven'. It is merely deceived into frustration; it remains embedded in the wilful heart. The only power that overcomes evil without a residue is not retaliation, not Stoic unforgiving sullenness, not a false indifference—only love that suffers. This alone is 'the name given under heaven whereby we must be saved'. Where at the cross we see qualitatively, what evil does to love, we also see what love does with evil. Not being overcome it overcomes. This is the faith which we commend in the confidence that its capacity to be received for what it is belongs in part with what is already present in the faiths of men. Ours is the task of eliciting the ability to receive—always in entire dependence on the Holy Spirit. [p. 140](#)

Some may enquire why it all matters. Are there not far more urgent tasks to be tackled in the world—ministry to human need, peace-making in the political order and all the duties of an acknowledged pluralism of human cultures and societies. Indeed, all such tasks are urgent but they do not exclude the ultimate witness to the being and nature of God. It is there that Christian witness takes us. For God is always the question of questions.

So 'commendation': it must be reverent for all we meet, honest about all we explore, hopeful about all we identify and wisely entrusted with the Lord's own commendation of himself.

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**Bishop Kenneth Cragg was Bishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East. [p. 141](#)**

## **The Church in the Sudan The International Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, London, England**

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*'The Church in the Sudan' is extracted from The Status of the Church in the Muslim World (Monograph No. 1 of IISIC), a survey of difficulties faced by Christians in Muslim majority situations (Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey) published in*