Christian Scriptures in Muslim Culture
in the Work of Kenneth Cragg

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Religious Studies
St. John’s College, Nottingham

August, 1997

Date awarded: 21st March 1998

James A. Tebbe
B.A., M.Div., M.A.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
Acknowledgements

There are many I should thank for their help but among them are several who deserve special mention:

My Supervisor, Dr George Bobawi, for his help, his insights into the process for writing a PhD, his critical analysis of my work, but most of all for his generous friendship.

Dr Christopher Lamb who discussed my topic with me and kindly loaned me a copy of his thesis on computer disc.

Dr Kenneth Cragg for interviews, his prompt responses to correspondence and help in finding some of his writings, but most of all for his wise insights and gracious patience towards a comparative novice in his area of study.

The Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois for providing full access to their extensive missions library, the inter-library loan and a room where I could work.

Dr Jim Stamoolis, Dean of the Wheaton Graduate School, for his numerous lunchtime conversations encouraging me in my study.

Most of all I am deeply grateful to my Director of Studies, Dr John Goldingay, for his patient, critical and yet kindly direction. Without his encouragement I would not have been able to complete this task.
Abstract

Much of Kenneth Cragg's writing is devoted to finding common ground between Christianity and Islam. A conservative Christian upbringing and a liberalising education based on the Enlightenment's values have contributed to this approach. Although Cragg often quotes the Bible, he has not written on Christian Scriptures to the same extent that he has on the Qur'an. His theology of Christian Scriptures has been affected by his engagement with the Qur'an. Cragg's traditional approach to the Bible has been reinforced by Muslims' view of their Scripture. To handle problems his traditional approach creates, Cragg filters Scriptures through a single model of revelation. Thus Scriptures are valued only for their contribution to this revelation. The result is that he unconsciously develops a canon within the canon. He solves problems with the Old Testament by handling it in a way similar to the Qur'an: both become a type of old testament to the New. In connection with the New Testament, 'hospitality' is key to Cragg's interpretation. Those parts which communicate his understanding of hospitality are one major, though often unarticulated, criterion for his canon within the canon. Cragg was one of the earliest to propose comparing Christ rather than the Bible to the Qur'an. His understanding of different scriptural issues between the Bible and the Qur'an has led him to see the comparison as one of revelation to revelation rather than Scripture to Scripture. Some of the difficulties that Cragg has had with the Bible as Scripture could be helped within the framework of his theology if he were to consider a variety of models, rather than a single one, for understanding Scriptures. His exegesis tends to be intuitive and at crucial points vulnerable to a more historical approach which is concerned to work with the meaning the author would have had for the text.
Table of Contents

1. Faith and Life Negotiate ................................................................. 1
   1.1 Other Studies on Cragg .............................................................. 4
   1.2 Life Experience and Influences .................................................. 10
      1.2.1 Theological Controversy Over Christian Scriptures ............... 11
      1.2.2 The Arab Christian and Christianity's Jewish Links ................ 14
   1.3 Changes in Cragg's Writings ....................................................... 15
   1.4 Overview of Cragg's Major Writings Relevant to Christian Scriptures ................................................. 20
   1.5 Basis for Assessing Kenneth Cragg ........................................... 24
   1.6 Summary ................................................................................. 28

2. Kenneth Cragg's Approach to Scripture in Islam ......................... 32
   2.1 Cragg's Interpretative Method .................................................... 34
      2.1.1 An example of Cragg's exegesis: Surah 3:7 ......................... 37
      2.1.2 A contrasting exegetical methodology .................................. 41
      2.1.3 Implications of Cragg's methodology in Quranic interpretation . 44
         2.1.3.1 Contextualised Gospel in the Qur'an .................................. 44
         2.1.3.2 The Qur'an as Scripture for Christians ............................... 47
   2.2 The Qur'an as a Scripture for the Arabs .................................... 51
      2.2.1 The Prophet as ummi (illiterate) .......................................... 52
      2.2.2 Language as revelation ...................................................... 54
      2.2.3 Translation ......................................................................... 58
   2.3 Context of the Qur'an .................................................................. 62
   2.4 Inspiration of the Qur'an ............................................................. 65
   2.5 Interpreting the Qur'an ............................................................... 67
      2.5.1 Traditional Quranic interpretation ...................................... 67
      2.5.2 Shi‘i-Sunni interpretations ................................................ 69
      2.5.3 Modern Muslim Examples ................................................ 70
   2.6 Broader Scriptural Issues .......................................................... 71
      2.6.1 Ḥadīth, Sunnah, and Ṣīrah .................................................. 72
      2.6.2 State and Sharʿah ............................................................... 75
      2.6.3 Taḥrīf: an uncontested polemic ........................................ 79
   2.7 Sola Qur'an .............................................................................. 82
### 3. Cragg’s Approach to Scriptures in Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Historical: Zwemer and Gairdner</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Modern: Wilfred Cantwell Smith</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Temple Gairdner and Kenneth Cragg</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 A move away from confrontation</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Brotherhood in Islam and Christianity</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Revelation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 Old Testament — New Testament discontinuity</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5 Scriptural Criticism and the Ḥadith</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.6 Translation and Koine Greek</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.7 Drama</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.8 The Gospel of Barnabas</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.9 Summary</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Samuel Zwemer and Kenneth Cragg</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 General approach to Islam</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1.1 The cross and uniqueness of Christianity</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Scriptural issues</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2.1 The Qur’an</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2.2 The Bible</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Summary</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Kenneth Cragg</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 General Approaches to Islam: Modernity versus Post-Modernity</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1.1 Modernity defined</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1.2 Cragg: an unconscious modernist</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1.3 Post-modernity defined</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1.4 Smith and post-modernity</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Revelation and Scriptures</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3 Approaches to the New and Old Testaments</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4 Summary</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Kenneth Bailey and Kenneth Cragg</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1 Peasant culture</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2 The parables of Jesus and the nature of Christian Scriptures</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Lamin Sanneh and Kenneth Cragg</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

   4.1 Scripture or Scriptures? ....................................................................................... 156
   4.2 Canon of Christian Scriptures ........................................................................... 160
   4.3 Translation ............................................................................................................ 169
   4.4 Revelation and Christian Scriptures .................................................................. 181
      4.4.1 Revelation: Bible or Christ .................................................................... 183
         4.4.1.1 History of seeing revelation in Christ rather than the Bible .......... 185
         4.4.1.2 History of Muslim-Christian encounter .............................................. 189
      4.4.2 Cragg's understanding of revelation .................................................... 192
         4.4.2.1 Revelation through personality ............................................................ 194
         4.4.2.2 Revelation through suffering ................................................................. 196
         4.4.2.3 Revelation through participation ............................................................. 199
      4.4.3 Revelation: a single interpretative model for Christian Scriptures ... 201

5. Judgement and Nation: Cragg on the Old Testament ....................... 209
   5.1 Difficulties in the Old Testament .................................................................. 210
      5.1.1 Tribalism and exclusivity ........................................................................... 210
      5.1.2 Old Testament Messiah versus New Testament Christ .................. 212
      5.1.3 Old Testament ethics ............................................................................. 213
      5.1.4 Ethics of a tribal covenant ..................................................................... 215
      5.1.5 Old Testament as Scripture? .................................................................. 217
      5.1.6 Old Testament as canon .......................................................................... 218
      5.1.7 Cragg's handling of Old Testament difficulties ........................................ 219
   5.2 Old Testament as old testament .................................................................. 220
   5.3 An Alternative Approach ................................................................................. 224

6. Cragg on the New Testament ......................................................................... 228
   6.1 General Approaches to the New Testament ................................................. 229
      6.1.1 New Testament criticism ......................................................................... 229
      6.1.2 Unity of the New Testament .................................................................... 234
      6.1.3 The Epistles and Gospels as interactive revelation ............................. 236
      6.1.4 Revelation and Acts as non-Epistles and non-Gospels .......................... 240
   6.2 Implications for Cragg's New Testament Theology .................................... 243
      6.2.1 Prophethood ......................................................................................... 244
      6.2.2 Priest and King ....................................................................................... 245
   6.3 Summary ............................................................................................................. 249
# Table of Contents

   7.1 Why Hospitality? ............................................................................................................ 252
      7.1.1 Hospitality versus retrieval ............................................................................. 255
   7.2 Conceptual Origin of Hospitality for Cragg ................................................................. 260
      7.2.1 Hospitality in the Middle East ............................................................................. 261
      7.2.2 Hospitality and the changing nature of Christian/Muslim engagement ............. 263
   7.3 Meaning of Hospitality for Cragg ............................................................................. 264
   7.4 New Testament Basis for Hospitality ......................................................................... 270
      7.4.1 ἐκπέτασις .................................................................................................................. 271
      7.4.2 ἀποδοχή .................................................................................................................. 276
   7.5 Implications of Hospitality in New Testament Interpretation ................................... 280
      7.5.1 High view of the New Testament ......................................................................... 280
      7.5.2 Hospitality corrects exclusivity .......................................................................... 281
      7.5.3 Distinct versus unique ......................................................................................... 286
   7.6 Hospitality: Ethnicity or Culture? ............................................................................. 288

   8.1 General Exegetical Approach ................................................................................. 295
      8.1.1 The alert reader and Bible study ........................................................................... 295
      8.1.2 Use of biblical languages ..................................................................................... 300
      8.1.3 Scripture as poetry ............................................................................................... 304
      8.1.4 Imagination (typology) ....................................................................................... 305
      8.1.5 A homiletical style ............................................................................................... 307
   8.2 The Interpretation of Biblical Texts ......................................................................... 310
      8.2.1 Luke 15:11-32 The parable of the two sons ....................................................... 311
      8.2.2 Mark 5:1-20 The demoniac of the Gadarenes ..................................................... 324
      8.2.3 Peter's vision and meeting with Cornelius: Acts 10 ............................................ 330
      8.2.4 2 Corinthians 1:15-20 ......................................................................................... 334
   8.3 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 335

9. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 339

10. Select General Bibliography .................................................................................... 349

11. Bibliography of Kenneth Cragg ............................................................................. 369
1. Faith and Life Negotiate

Albert Kenneth Cragg is the most significant British missiologist in the area of Islam, either living or dead. Our concern in this thesis is with a central but largely unexamined question in his theological method, that is, his handling of Christian Scriptures.

Cragg (born 8 March, 1913, Blackpool, England) was reared in a household where a carefully taught Christian faith was a central ingredient. This faith, which he has continued to nurture throughout his long life, combined together with a successful pursuit of academics and Middle Eastern experience to produce a prolific and distinctive blend of writings, primarily, but not exclusively, about Islam. Many introductions and several fairly complete biographical sketches have been written about the influences in his life, including significant sections of a full thesis and Cragg's own autobiography. We will not duplicate that. For reference, however, we include a brief survey of Cragg's life in chart form to tie writings and life events together (Fig. 1).

The focus of this chapter is five-fold: 1) an introduction to other major academic studies on Kenneth Cragg; 2) aspects of Cragg's life which have bearing on his approach to Christian Scriptures; 3) the significance to our thesis of theological changes in Cragg's writings; 4) an introduction to writings relevant to our topic of Christian Scriptures in Muslim culture; 5) the basis for analysing Cragg.

1 The title of Cragg's 1994 autobiography.
Albert Kenneth Cragg, (b. Mar. 8, 1913-)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Significant Events</th>
<th>Selected Significant Writings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>BA Oxford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-36</td>
<td>Theological Missions College, Bristol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Ordained Deacon Church of England</td>
<td>Ellerton Theological Prize at Oxford University on ‘The Place of Authority in Matters of Religious Belief’, 1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-47</td>
<td>Lebanon Chaplain, All Saints' School Warden, St. Justin's Asst. Prof. Philosophy, American University Beirut</td>
<td>T. H. Green Moral Philosophy Prize, Oxford University on ‘Morality and Religion’, 1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947-51</td>
<td>Parish ministry in England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-56</td>
<td>Hartford Seminary, USA Prof. Arabic &amp; Islamics</td>
<td>Co-editor The Muslim World Jan. 1952-April, 1960 The Call of the Minaret, 1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Middle East, Turkey, N. Africa Rockefeller Travelling Scholarship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-59</td>
<td>Jerusalem Resident Canon, St. George's</td>
<td>‘Operation Reach’, Sept. 1957-July 1962 Sandals at the Mosque, 1959 City of Wrong (tr.), 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>New York, Union Theological Seminary Visiting Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Ibadan, Nigeria Visiting Professor</td>
<td>The Privilege of Man, 1968 Christianity in World Perspective, 1968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1974-78 | Sussex  
Reader in Religious Studies at University of Sussex (retired 1978)  
Honorary Assistant Bishop of Chichester | The Wisdom of the Sufis, 1976  
The Christian and Other Religion, 1977  
Islam and the Muslim, 1978 |
| 1978-81 | Huddersfield  
Vicar of Helme  
Assistant Bishop of Wakefield | 'Grace Cup', Epiphany, 1979-All Saints Tide, 1983  
Islam from Within, 1980  
Paul and Peter, 1980 |
| 1982 | Oxford  
Retired  
Assistant Bishop of Oxford | This Year in Jerusalem, 1982  
Muhammad and the Christian, 1984  
The Pen and the Faith, 1985  
Jesus and the Muslim, 1985  
The Christ and the Faiths, 1986  
Poetry of the Word at Christmas, 1987  
Readings in the Qur'an, 1988  
What Decided Christianity, 1989  
The Arab Christian, 1991  
To Meet and to Greet, 1992  
Troubled by Truth, 1992  
Faith and Life Negotiate, 1994  
Returning to Mount Hira', 1994  
The Lively Credentials of God, 1995 |

(Figure 1)
1.1 Other Studies on Cragg

A fair range of material has been written about Cragg. The most commonly known and accessible are reviews of his various books. Articles on the general approach of his work have also been written. There is also a variety of introductory paragraphs on him at the beginnings of books and articles.

Relevant material from these sources is mentioned in this thesis as needed. Finally there are analytical studies on Cragg. In this introduction we briefly comment on four which we consider to be representatively significant. Three are Ph.D. theses. They represent rigorous academic intent, although only Lamb's has much relevance to our topic. The fourth is a relatively recent article by Indian Islamicist, Andreas D'Souza. We have chosen this because it is representative of one common type of critique of Cragg.

The earliest thesis is Ipema's (1971). He compares Cragg with Zwemer and Macdonald (historical figures) and W. C. Smith (contemporary), in three areas: the prophethood of Muhammad, the witness of Islam, and Islam in the twentieth century. Ipema's thesis is based on only a few of Cragg's books and fewer of the many articles by Cragg which would have been available at the time of writing. Of interest to us are the few comments Ipema makes about

---

2 See for instance Jan Slomp's 'Meeting between Church and Mosque. Introducing the work of Dr Kenneth Cragg,' Al-Mushir 14 (1972), 1-8; or Henry Victor 'Introducing Bishop Kenneth Cragg,' Salaam, 6 (1985), 34-44.


Cragg's theological method, particularly with respect to Christian Scriptures. He cites Cragg on the subject of New Testament criticism but offers no insights.\textsuperscript{5} Ipema offers that 'Cragg really addresses Christians in his writings but is hopeful that Muslims will also be in his audience.'\textsuperscript{6} Audience is important when it comes to assessing Cragg's theological method, but Ipema does not address that issue. He notes that many Muslims would not be 'familiar' with Cragg's exposition of Islam but interprets Cragg as being satisfied if a few, 'intelligent Muslims' were convinced he was on the right track.\textsuperscript{7} Cragg's hope, according to Ipema, is that just as a small group of scholars has influenced Christianity enormously, so the same could happen for Islam. Others challenge the validity of Cragg's theological approach on the grounds of the widespread rejection of his use of different and individual interpretative methods.\textsuperscript{8} Ipema merely notes the problem through the mention of potential audience, not taking up the issue of theological method at all.

Jones's thesis deals more with Cragg than did Ipema. It, however, post-dates Lamb's thesis by a year but obviously did not draw on Lamb's comprehensive coverage of Cragg. Jones analyses Cragg's and W. C. Smith's different versions of mission which can be understood through studying their differing approaches to Islam. Jones summarises his comparison.

How reliable is the Muslim way of arriving at knowledge of God? Defective, according to Cragg; as good as humanly possible, according to

\textsuperscript{5} Ipema, 'Islam Interpretation', 48. The quote sounds like Cragg but the reference Ipema gives is incorrect. Not being able to find it, we have taken it no farther.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
Smith. Is the Holy Spirit at work in Islam? Possibly — or assuredly. Is Islam a way of salvation? There is no way to be sure — or of course.9

Cragg himself challenged Jones’s imposed evaluative framework illustrated in the above quote (‘Prepositions and Salvation’ 1993). Jones also concludes that the difference between Smith and Cragg can be attributed largely to their prior Christian orientations. He has not caught the theological shift in Cragg’s writing. Like Ipema and others, his thesis was developed from only a limited range of Cragg’s material and it interprets Cragg’s later writings in the light of his earliest contributions.

Writing from the Henry Martyn Institute in India where he was Director, Andreas D’Souza is an articulate representative of a fairly broad group who are critical of Cragg’s writing.10 Basically the criticism is directed at Cragg’s theological method in his approach to Islam. D’Souza argues that Cragg both misunderstands and misinterprets Islam. As a result he misrepresents Islam to Christians and in so doing hinders opportunity for further dialogue.

D’Souza writes

The academic study of Islam undoubtedly has some effect on the Muslim world, but only when it honestly and consistently tries to do justice to the variety of ways in which Muslims have interpreted and expressed their own faith. When academicians move beyond their stated goals of examining, ‘What is Islam?’ to propound what, in their opinion, Islam and Muslims should be, they not only alienate Muslims, but also cloud true understanding of a living tradition.11

Ever sensitive to the volatile religious situation in the sub-continent D’Souza worries about Muslim response to Cragg. That [Cragg’s writings] did not

become the bitter focus of major debate is due in part to the fact that they have not been translated.\footnote{Ibid., 66.} D'Souza's conclusions are based on a limited selection of Cragg's writings, again almost all from early in his writing career.\footnote{He summarises the sources he uses at the beginning of the article: \textit{The Call of the Minaret} (1956), \textit{Sandals at the Mosque} (1959), \textit{The House of Islam} (1969), \textit{The Event of the Qur'an} (1971) and the study series 'Operation Reach' (1957) and 'Emmaus Furlongs' (1962).}

D'Souza insists that Cragg makes a false distinction between Muslim (the one who practices) and Islamic (the ideal).\footnote{Ibid., 41.} Islam is what Muslims say it is, according to D'Souza. The correct Christian approach is then to understand and interact with Muslims' own interpretation, not to come up with a new rendering. This is not an entirely fair critique. Cragg does distinguish between Islam and \textit{islām} (submission [to God]) and between Muslim and \textit{muslim} (one who submits) explaining that Islam is an institutionalising of \textit{islām} (\textit{House of Islam} 1969, 5). But the point is not quite the same. Popular Muslim understanding takes the position D'Souza rejects. It, not Cragg, makes the distinction between 'Islam' and 'Muslim' where Islam is the ideal as seen in the Prophet Muhammad and the Pious Caliphate while Muslims are humans whose practice of Islam is imperfect.\footnote{This was an often repeated premise of Muhammad Aslam, teacher of the M. A. course 'The Holy Prophet and the Pious Caliphate' at Punjab University in 1978 where the present author was a student at the time.} Indeed, the concept of practice and interpretation falling short of the ideal is a theme common to many religions.

The third reason this is an unfair critique is the fact that Cragg's innovative interpreting applies not just to the Qur'ān but also to Christian Scriptures. D'Souza argues against what he understands to be Cragg's concept of
revelation in the Qur'an but writes nothing about the distinct way Cragg applies it to Christian Scriptures. To a remarkable degree, Cragg is equally honest and equally innovative in his interpretation of Christian Scriptures as he is in connection with the Qur'an.

Lamb's thesis is by far the broadest in scope, the most accurate and, for our purposes, the best source of background material on Cragg. One major contribution of the thesis is Lamb's comprehensive bibliography of Cragg's writings which was updated in 1992. Lamb, however, missed some highly significant pieces for the purposes of our thesis.

Like D'Souza Lamb questions the validity of Cragg's approach to Islam, but he is more open-minded to a possible positive outcome than is D'Souza. After noting that the majority of Muslims reject Cragg's approach, Lamb speculates that 'It may be that time and further Muslim thought will prove [Cragg's theological method] right.' For Lamb, Cragg's theological method is deficient in that the definitions and categories are individual to him but more importantly they do not lead Cragg to accept Muslims' own interpretation of their faith.

---

16 Recently Lamb's thesis was published in book form almost word for word from the original thesis in The Call to Retrieval 1997. Because the book is more accessible, we cite from that, where possible. The 1997 publication has added no analysis and only a very few references to Cragg's writing which post-dated the thesis. We conclude that Lamb views Cragg's later work through the spectacles of his early writing.
17 Lamb, 'A Bibliography of Kenneth Cragg,' Muslim World, 58 (1993), 177-191. There are several typographical errors which we have tried to correct. More significantly Lamb does not claim to be exhaustive and there are a few omissions.
19 Lamb, Call to Retrieval, 35.
Lamb does, however, take his analysis of Cragg to an application one step further than D'Souza. Noting (as did Ipema) that Cragg's writings are geared mostly toward a minority of Christians, he finally concludes in his last chapter that Cragg's inadequate theology of religion leads to a shortcoming in his theological method, which does not address certain key questions: ‘... there is a certain evasiveness on the major questions of the Christian theology of religion, and a deep reluctance to pronounce on the status of other faiths in relation to Christianity.’

The points concerning theological method noted above highlight the relevance of our thesis. Scholars in the area of the theology of religion face the common questions of What is Islam and what is Christianity? Is it what the adherents of the faiths say it is? If so which adherents? If not, what are the sources for the faiths? Cragg's interpretation of Islam is mostly derived from the Qur'an and what he understands its real meaning to be. Some question the validity of this approach. There is no doubt that Cragg interprets the Qur'an in a way that is different from the majority of Muslims. Ipema skirts the issue of theological method. D'Souza and Lamb apply it to his approach to Islam. Lamb and Jones also make reference to implications in Christian theology primarily in the area of how Christians should understand Islam, but no study is made of Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures.

---

20 Ibid., 171.
21 Ibid., 35
22 Lamb comes the closest when he refers to Cragg's work as a 'biblically-grounded Christian theology of inter-faith relations'. But he does not explain how they are biblically grounded. Call to Retrieval, 172.
In this thesis, we assess theological method and in that sense overlap with the above mentioned writers, but because our focus is different, so is our starting point. Our own approach is to assess in what ways Cragg's engagement with Islam may have influenced his own approach to the Bible. Thus we make no attempt at a comprehensive review but rather focus on two significant background issues for Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures.

1.2 Life Experience and Influences

The influences in Cragg's life which Lamb traces are developed through the lens of what moved him from his careful, conservative upbringing to a wider worldview who sought to look compassionately rather than polemically (which his background would have called for) on Islam. Thus there was an emphasis on the broadening aspects of Cragg's education. Particular mention is made of those writers who influenced him and whom he subsequently quoted in his own works. This enabled him to approach Islam in a less polemical way than might have been the case from his upbringing.

Cragg himself highlights the freeing qualities academics brought to him. Nevertheless, he interprets his own development in the light of strong continuity with his upbringing, shunning the use of adjectives such as 'narrow' and always expressing appreciation for the faith it gave him. This is illustrated in Cragg's own autobiography, which post-dates Lamb's thesis and, in places, paints a different picture from Lamb's.
In *Faith and Life Negotiate* (1994) Cragg makes a self-assessment of how the reality of life-events, particularly the challenges posed by Islam, have had an impact on his own Christian faith and led to the creative tension which bore fruit in his writing. The unifying theme for *Faith and Life Negotiate* is the development of Cragg's own faith position. There is a striking similarity in the factual material between his autobiography and Lamb's earlier thesis, illustrating that it came from the same source. Thus the sometimes contrasting appraisal of the same events is all the more worth noting here.

### 1.2.1 Theological controversy over Christian Scriptures

At the time of his ordination studies Cragg found himself in the midst of theological controversy. 'The unhappy episode was part of that ugly preoccupation with a Biblical literalism which had beset the Anglican missionary mind in the twenties and had led to the formation of the new society' (*Faith and Life Negotiate* 1994, 44). The arguments over interpretation of the Bible divided the Anglican Church for some ten years and led to the formation, in 1922, of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS) as a breakaway from Church Missionary Society (CMS). Caught between his own convictions and family loyalty, Cragg avoided choosing sides when he went to the mission field.

These events, of course, could not help but have an effect on Cragg's own interpretation of Christian Scriptures. At the time, however, he writes that he
was not as aware of the issues as he was later. Had he been, he believes he
would have found the approach to Christian Scriptures his teachers had
'spiritually deplorable and intellectually obtuse' (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994,
46). Shunning words like 'rebel', which Lamb attributes to him,\(^{23}\) Cragg was
positive about aspects of his ordination study. 'If Bristol had delayed my faith-
negotiation it had, in its own way, served it. Not temperamentally belligerent,
I found bearings by which to identify where the wider theological scene must
lie' (ibid., 47).

He interpreted the theological strictures compassionately, always recalling his
indebtedness to at least part of that tradition. He carried this compassionate
pastoral approach into inter-faith questions later in life. Cragg's interpretation
of what must have been a most wrenching personal experience indicates his
approach of compassionate openness to conservative attitudes in not just
Christianity, but also later in Islam. One result of this approach has been that
both conservative and liberal Christians alike claim him and interact with
what he has to say.

These evangelical roots which Cragg continues to claim are visible in what
some call his 'christianising' of Islam. These conservative Christian
influences can also be found in areas where not much as yet has been written
about Cragg, for instance his theology of Christian Scriptures.

The pointless division for Cragg on issues about Scripture had pastoral
implications. This was the first of many attacks by Cragg against exclusivity in

\(^{23}\) ibid., 11.
religion. This is a key element in Cragg's approach to inter-faith issues between Christianity and Islam. One could argue that because Cragg was affected by the divisive nature of the controversy on Christian Scriptures, it became a topic he did not directly address until later in his career when he tackled doctrinal questions about the liabilities of Christian Scriptures in *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985) and *What Decided Christianity* (1989) (*Faith and Life Negotiate* 1994, 216). It should be added, however, that this did not stop him from extensive use of Christian Scriptures in the development of his own theology.

Thus just as one must not ignore the thought-freeing effect Oxford had on Cragg's life, neither must the effect of his careful Christian upbringing and the experiences from that community be ignored. It is in this area of strong links to his conservative Christian upbringing that Cragg's own autobiography offers a different perspective from what was written about by Lamb. He interprets his life as a negotiation between his Christian faith, with which there has been a strong continuity from childhood, and the reality of conflicting belief systems in the world, which he tries to face with complete integrity. He carries this same theme into *Troubled by Truth* (1992) where thirteen people of different faiths are studied as they try to deal with the exclusive claims of religion in their lives.

Cragg is known for his insights into Islam but to ignore his Christian theological perspective and his handling of Christian Scriptures is a mistake. We argue that there are also innovative interpretations in his approach to
Christian Scriptures as well which have strong links to his background yet have been tempered by his engagement with Islam.

1.2.2 The Arab Christian and Christianity's Jewish links

The second major background issue we note arises from Cragg's time in the Middle East where he was in intimate contact with Arab Christians. This period was strongly linked with the Christian and more specifically, Anglican church. His early years with the British Syria Mission, one of four small, evangelical missions to become part of what is now known as Middle East Christian Outreach, did not have the same formal Anglican ties Cragg later had in the Middle East.

When he returned to the Middle East, however, it was first as resident Canon in St. George's in Jerusalem. Then from 1970-74 he was based in Cairo as Assistant Bishop of the Jerusalem Archbishopric which at the time covered the Anglican communion from Morocco to Iraq. In each case extensive travel was part of his brief. The vital links with the church, particularly during his Cairo years gave him insights into Arab Christian life. This highlighted again for him the problem of exclusivity in the way Christianity's link to 'ethnic' Jewry is interpreted by some western Christians. This created a situation which, in practice, excluded Arab Christians.

For the Arab Christians within their own nationhood, there is a wellnigh insupportable ambivalence. What may be to other nations the merely sentimental, or the blindly racial, reaction to Jewry, or for other Christians an easy acknowledgement of spiritual ancestry, is for them a specific confrontation. It is a controversy about displaced populations, appropriated lands, military defeats and persistent fears. These stand in their own concreteness ('Anglican Church' 1969, 588).
Cragg's entire approach to Christian Scriptures is coloured, at least to some extent, by this perceived problem of exclusivity. He soon came to the interpretation that the problem the Arab church faced was part of a larger, theological difficulty.

In a measure, the Arab Church is only in an acutely emotional form of a [sic] problem which is relatively present for all Gentile Christians, western, African or Asian, namely a right understanding of the integrity of the Bible and a proper discipline for the Old Testament under the New (ibid., 587-8).

Out of this concern was eventually to come one of Cragg's major works, *The Arab Christian* (1991). Also stemming from it was a developing theology of Biblical interpretation which moved Cragg ever further from a traditional interpretation of the Old Testament.

### 1.3 Changes in Cragg's Writings

Lamb has written his entire thesis with the assumption that Cragg's theological framework was well established early in his life and that he deviated from it remarkably little. However, Lamb also gives credence to the charges that Cragg at times engages in 'theological sleight of hand' and writes quite differently depending on his location and audience. We examine a sample of the evidence relevant to our thesis to see whether or not there is change and if so, what kind.

---

24 Lamb, 'The Call to Retrieval,' synopsis.
25 Ibid.
26 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 15.
Faith and Life Negotiate

The Christ and the Faiths (1986) and The Call of the Minaret (1956) give very different perspectives on Christian Scriptures, particularly regarding Cragg's approach to the Old Testament. Below we give examples to illustrate the point.

From The Call of the Minaret:

The Biblical revelation borrows endless 'occasions' of human existence that in them it may representatively reveal the pattern of the kingdom of heaven (279).

'Occasions,' too, explain much of the Old Testament. H. G. Wells in his Short History of the World impatiently complained that the Bible spent too long rehearsing the story of a very insignificant people with a very undistinguished succession of kings. What he failed to see was that the Biblical interest in Israel was, among other things, illustrative of the doctrine of humanity. Events are recorded from Abraham, through the Exodus, in the exile and beyond, not because they exhaust what is significant in the human story, but because they are representative of human waywardness and because their particular sequence has its place in the preparation for redemption in Christ (280).

From The Christ and the Faiths:

... the wanderings of the Ark, and sundries in royal chronicles, are trivial or inconsequential. They have their fascination for historians but should they monopolise the ground of Scripture to the degree they do, when they thus exclude so much from liturgy and life richer and worthier ... (332).

From The Call of the Minaret:

... the Psalms, as poems of lament, complaint, fear, or dismay ... in their accumulative witness to the meaning of God in human life ... communicate the 'felt' significance of the truth that God willed humans to understand (280).

From The Christ and the Faiths:

For all their deep splendid quality of devotion and adoration, the Psalms breathe a very powerful and insistent identity-vigilance which has passed over into the ethos of the users. ... 'Truly my soul waits upon God', cries the psalmist in Psalm 62, but his mind moves at once to his enemies and his maledictions on them: 'You shall be slain all of you' ... nourishing
the very particularism of nations or sects or causes which the will to be Church must renounce (331).

Thus a traditional understanding of the Old Testament's history gives way to a questioning of the significance of that particular history. In the example from the Psalms, Cragg has changed from an interpretation which expresses the feelings of the writer to a rejection of the exclusivity which comes in their calls for judgment. Thus we see that Cragg interprets the relevance to Scriptures of the history of Israel and the spiritual qualities of the Psalms quite differently in 1986 from the way he did thirty years earlier in his first book. The immediate impression given by these quotes is an inconsistency or possibly a shifting approach, depending on location or audience. This is an accusation which Lamb has entertained. This particularly seems to be the case if it is considered that a second, revised edition of *The Call of the Minaret* was undertaken in 1985, very close to the time Cragg was writing *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986). On the surface it seems Cragg is simply being inconsistent. Cragg himself, however, interprets this differently. His intention in revising *The Call of the Minaret* in 1985 was to update his best known and most popular book in the light of new political and social realities in the Muslim world. It was not to update his Christian theological position. To do so would mean rewriting the whole book, making it something totally different. Instead he chose to call the reader to other writing to observe the theological change.

Short of rewriting the whole burden of intention in the book, which would not meet the interest in its reissue, there was no other option [but to keep the section on Christianity unchanged]. No authorship, least of all in an evolving situation, can well keep all its instincts intact over so long an interval. Yet these can still identify critically with their first venture. Later publications, which I have immodestly listed in the Book List, may indicate how further ventures have shaped meantime (*Call of the Minaret*, 1985 edition, vi).
Cragg obviously still saw a continuity with early thinking, but continuity is different from what he might write, starting afresh, as evidenced by what was in *The Christ and the Faiths*. In his autobiography Cragg writes more on his change of perspective on the Old Testament.

In later years, however, I have come to feel ill at ease in much psalmody... There are far fewer psalms that do not mention 'foes' and 'fears' than there are those that do. The sublime reaches of Psalm 139 are rarer than the dark enmities of 58 or the bitterness of 137. No doubt, devotion can allegorise, but allegory was not what the authors meant... One had to ask what all this meant for the validity of that which made it so (*Faith and Life Negotiate* 1994, 195-6).

Some who follow Cragg interpret his later writings in the light of earlier work. Part of the reason may be that while he was still making a name for himself Cragg put more effort into communicating clearly. Thus his earlier writing is often much clearer and less ambiguous in its language. As comprehensive and thorough as Lamb is, he falls into the same trap. For instance in his final summary where he notes that evangelicals have claimed Cragg as one of theirs he quotes from *The Call of the Minaret* a statement about Cragg's belief in the need for conversion. He goes on to quote (*The Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 17) that 'Later books are not less insistent that "The Christian Gospel is conversionist through and through".' But Cragg was writing in the context of Hindu objections to Christianity and the way Lamb quotes him does not accurately convey the main perspectives of *The Christ and the Faiths*. Additionally, Lamb failed to note a significant change in Cragg's second edition (1985) of *The Call of the Minaret* where in the first

---


28 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 170.
edition Chapter 11 dealing with the unresponsiveness in the Muslim world, entitled 'The Call to Patience', was changed to 'The Call to Hope and Faith'. Although the content basically was not changed for reasons given above, Cragg could not leave a heading which seemed to indicate Christians waiting for conversion. The watershed of change was *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986) to which Lamb would have only just had access as he was completing his thesis. It seems Lamb interpreted it in the light of earlier material which was already well formed in his work.

It would be better for earlier work to be interpreted through the light of later writings. Logical outcomes of particular theological positions are more clearly visible in this way. This is what we have tried to do. There is significant theological change but it is an understandable progression from earlier writing to later. This point is important to our thesis because changes in Cragg's theological position reflect his engagement with Islam and give an indication of how that affects his approach to Christian Scriptures. Some of the theological perspectives which have changed and which we deal with in this thesis are:

1) A movement from quite a traditional faith position regarding the Old Testament to a more critical stance (5.2).

2) The theme of 'contrast' in respective revelations becomes less visible over the years as Cragg continues to develop his understanding of revelation and compares revelation to revelation rather than Scripture to Scripture (4.5).
3) A move towards a more rigid understanding of the nature of translation of Christian Scriptures (4.4).

4) A changing definition of 'retrieval' and a much less frequent use of it in later writing (7.1.1).

1.4 Overview of Cragg's Major Writings Relevant to Christian Scriptures

There are certain periods to Cragg's writings. Indications of this can be seen in books which post-date The Call of the Minaret but are not part of Cragg's latest (post-retirement) writings. He himself notes some of these for reference in his second edition of The Call of the Minaret. Among this list are ones which include material of particular relevance for the topic of Christian Scriptures. They are Christianity in World Perspective (1968), The Privilege of Man (1968), Alive to God (1970), and The Christian and Other Religion (1977). All of these contain material significant for this thesis and represent Cragg's evolving ideas which find greater clarity in later writing.

Books which deal with Cragg's approach to the Qur'ān are also of relevance to our topic in that they shed light on Cragg's understanding of scriptural questions. Of particular relevance are Returning to Mount Hira' (1994), The Pen and the Faith(1985), The Mind of the Qur'ān (1973), and The Event of the Qur'ān (1971). Others of his writings, along with a number of articles and chapters in books are referenced when relevant.
There is, however, a category of Cragg's writing which has either not been
dealt with at all, or if it has been considered has not been dealt with in the light
of its intended purpose. This is Cragg's writing which has a particular focus on
Christian Scriptures. Here there are two types of material. The first consists of
Cragg's overt assessment of his own theological grappling with issues
concerning Christian Scriptures. The second are materials which are Bible
studies by Cragg's definition and shed light on how he does his exegesis.

In his own autobiography Cragg indicates that it was not until relatively late in
his career that he came to grips with problems that scholarship may have with
the Christian faith in Jesus and the Muslim (1985) and What Decided
Christianity (1989) (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 216). Jesus and the Muslim
(1985) was written just before Lamb's thesis was completed and What Decided
Christianity (1989) post-dated it. Since then Faith and Life Negotiate (1994) was
written, and we could also add Cragg's The Lively Credentials of God (1995).
Finally Cragg has commented that he believes chapter 14 in The Christ and the
Faiths (1986) to be a key to understanding his position on Christian
Scriptures.29

The first, Jesus and the Muslim (1985), contains a long chapter on the New
Testament, which touches on a variety of issues including higher criticism and
the formation and nature of the New Testament canon. It does not, however,
grapple extensively with the issues and is written in relatively simple
language, as Cragg has in mind the educated Muslim layperson as his
audience.

29 Personal interview by author with Kenneth Cragg in Oxford, 26 August, 1994. We quote from
What Decided Christianity is Cragg's response to the gauntlet thrown down by John Bowden in his book Jesus, the Unanswered Questions. In a Note to the Second Impression of his book, Bowden stated,

Despite warnings that I would be 'flayed' by critics, I have yet to come across a criticism of any substance from those with more 'orthodox' views, in print or otherwise. Some people have commented that they would be more positive about what we can know about Jesus than I am, but have not elaborated on how and why.

Cragg took up the above challenge, and in so doing dealt with issues of Christian Scriptures, particularly the New Testament (see Ch. 4, 6 especially).

The Lively Credentials of God (1995), not surprisingly from the title, also consciously covers Christian Scriptures. Scriptures are a part of God's credentials; they are there to be questioned and examined. But they are not something only for the past as God’s credentials are always living (lively). All three, along with the relevant parts of The Christ and the Faiths (1986), are key works for Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures, and they reflect his grappling with an area of scholarship which he had not previously touched on in his writing.

Though Cragg quotes Christian Scriptures extensively in virtually all his writings, there is also a significant body of material which has not yet been carefully studied as it was not properly published and consequently is not as accessible. There are the four pamphlet series which contain some Bible studies and sermon-type material. They are: 'Operation Reach' (54 issues),

---

30 Interview with Cragg 26 August, 1994 in Oxford. In the brief annotated bibliography at the end of What Decided Christianity where Cragg recommends further reading, he makes special mention of Bowden's book but does not say that what he had written was directly in response.

Cragg describes ‘Operation Reach’ as ‘carrying a Bible study and a presentation of some central feature of Islam for reflection and testing in the circle of experience the recipients enjoyed’ (*Faith and Life Negotiate* 1994, 124). He is referring, of course, to Muslim culture as it was seen in the Middle East. It is not clear if Lamb was able fully to review all of these for his thesis. His brief assessment of them seems to come through secondary sources. He does summarise that ‘Operation Reach’ pamphlets are deep and extremely concise statements of major themes in Cragg’s writings which are incorporated into later books.32

The above 98 documents consist of some one thousand two hundred pages. They predate many of Cragg’s major works and, by Cragg’s own assessment, are ‘Bible studies.’ There is also Bible study material in other books. For instance *Paul and Peter* (1980) is an imaginative study of Galatians 1:18 and *The Privilege of Man* (1968) contains an exegetical interpretation of the Prodigal Son parable which Kenneth Bailey (Ch. 3, 8) develops more fully. These and others we study in Chapter 8 as we analyse some examples of how Cragg does exegesis.

---

32 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 120.
Thus, in summary, our sources in Cragg consist of three types of material, 1) writing which informs our topic of Christian Scriptures but whose major focus is otherwise, 2) writing in which Cragg consciously develops a theological approach to Christian Scriptures, and, 3) 'Bible study' material.

1.5 Basis for Assessing Kenneth Cragg

Cragg often has been critiqued on the basis of being an orientalist but Lamb notes that his primary qualification is that of a theologian as his Ph. D. was assessed under the Department of Theology at Oxford. Lamb, nevertheless assesses him as an orientalist in his conclusion. 'As scholar and Orientalist he has concentrated on the Qur'an and contemporary Muslim writers and hardly at all on historic Islam.' Cragg would not classify himself as an orientalist and notes the suspicion many Muslims have had with the 'discipline' of orientalism (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 9). In this thesis we do not assess him as an orientalist. The concept of the discipline has been strongly critiqued by Edward Said in his well-known book Orientalism. Said argues that his model of imperialism for understanding orientalism best fits the facts of history. 'Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient, we will encounter few surprises.'

---

33 Ibid., 2.
34 Ibid., 172-3.
Bernard Lewis affirms that the charge that Orientalism is a discipline in which latent imperialism lurks is not without foundation. Cragg is not an imperialist. For example we noted above that when he revised *The Call of the Minaret* (1985) he specifically updated information which would reflect social and political realities in the Muslim world. We also noted that he acknowledged that his Christian theological perspective had changed but to rewrite that would have made it a different book. What is of significance now is the point that reworking his Christian theology was not as important for Cragg as was correcting any perceived hints of colonialism which changing political events over thirty years might read back into his first and best known book.

Not only is the term orientalist tainted with imperialist overtones which we cannot attribute to Cragg, but it is inadequate in other ways as well. Lewis indicates the problem. '[Orientalist] designates, with extreme vagueness, the object of the scholar's studies but gives no indication of his method or purpose.' Cragg has been critiqued for the areas of Islam he does not consider, such as, Islamic jurisprudence. Such a critique may not be entirely fair. His purpose and method must be taken into account, not just his conclusions. Part of the problem with such a critique is that Cragg is assumed (mistakenly, we believe) to be an orientalist where the object of his studies is vaguely identified but not his purpose or method. In this thesis we demonstrate that while Cragg does not see 'state' in Islam in a positive light and so seeks to reinterpret it, that

---

37 Ibid., 10.
38 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 82.
approach is directly parallel to his reading of the Christian Church’s handling of the Old Testament. He offers equally innovative interpretations there. His interpretation of state in Islam cannot be taken in isolation from his handling of his own Christian Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament. The contribution he has to make is thus not an interpretation of Islam in isolation and a study of how that squares with how Muslims see it. Rather it is the contribution of a theologian doing theology in cross-reference with a view to an honest bringing closer together of the understanding of Scriptures in both faiths.

We should also note that neither is Cragg an historian, a sociologist or even an Islamicist in the sense of understanding and engaging with modern or historic religious and political institutions of Islam. All these disciplines are considered to be but often are unstated parts of being an orientalist. Thus, we argue, orientalist is not a useful term for us when it comes to the basis for assessing Cragg. The category is too broad and undefined.

What Cragg is, is a theologian, seeking to understand a faith position from a faith position. Though he sometimes claims the status of a layman in theology, theology is his primary area of training and the inter-faith issues he takes up are theological ones. We, however, do not assess Cragg as a theologian in his approach to Islam but rather in how he approaches Christian Scriptures and how his engagement with Islam may have affected his approach to these Scriptures.

Even though we assess Cragg as a theologian, he is not a systematic theologian and it is relatively easy to find inconsistencies in his theological method, particularly in some of the ways he approaches Christian Scriptures. He is a pastor, and though this is not an academic category, it affects his approach to people which in turn affects his writings. His constant work towards reconciliation and his strong abhorrence of any kind of exclusivity demonstrates this. He is also a poet or at least an artist with words,\textsuperscript{40} whose imagery goes beyond straight logic. Yet like the category of pastor, this is more a factor to consider than a quality to assess. Recognising this helps us in assessing his theological approach.

Finally, our topic of Christian Scriptures is of special relevance to the evangelical stream within Protestant Christianity, for whom Christian Scriptures are important. There is validity to making an assessment in this light in that Cragg claims continuity with and a debt to his Christian upbringing in this tradition. His autobiography clearly establishes that link. Though he writes of the freedom of thought which education gave him, that freedom did not take him in a direction which was discontinuous with his background. When he went to the Middle East it was with a clearly evangelical mission. Though he could not side with the most extreme forms of evangelicalism, he did maintain enough ties and identity to be invited to

\textsuperscript{40}See for instance Cragg's \textit{Poetry of the Word at Christmas}, 1987.
contribute to books that represent the evangelical position. Thus evangelicals themselves have claimed him.

It is not just evangelicals who have claimed him but scholars also have tended to categorise him as an evangelical. Despite focusing on the liberalising influences, Lamb sees him in this light when he focuses his thesis on the aspect of 'retrieval' in Cragg's theology. Both Ipema and Jones also cast him in this light, with Jones overtly categorising him as an 'evangelical'. We assess how far this is true with respect to Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures.

1.6 Summary

The study in this thesis includes Cragg's later writings in a way that has not yet been done by others. Since retirement, Cragg has been relatively prolific in his writing output, completing no less than 17 major works. Apart from brief reviews, well over half of these have not been analysed to understand further developments in Cragg's theology. Serious academic study has either come too early to utilise these sources, or, if it was late enough to incorporate some of these works of Cragg, it either did not consult them or focused on his earlier writings, with later writings (if considered at all) being seen through the light

---

of earlier work. Lamb has argued that Cragg's theological framework was established very early in his life and that as a result there is remarkable consistency in his writings. While it is possible that there is validity to this argument when it comes to Cragg's approach to Islam, we have noted that Cragg himself has written his perspective has changed. In this thesis we demonstrate that this change is particularly evident in his approach to Christian Scriptures. Thus, unlike other work which has been done on Cragg, this thesis interprets Cragg's earlier writing in the light of later significant work.

Secondly, this thesis will also assess Cragg's theological method in his approach to Christian Scriptures. We are particularly interested in how his engagement with Islam may have affected his theology in this area. This is an analysis others have not done.

We have argued that this is a valid approach for several reasons, all of which will be more fully developed in the thesis: 1) Cragg quotes or references Christian Scriptures extensively, 2) he has written specifically on this subject, particularly later in his career, 3) a major part of his approach to Islam focuses on the Qur'an and questions about the nature of revelation, which has direct relevance to the topic of Christian Scriptures, 4) Cragg is best assessed on the basis of being a theologian.

Thirdly, it is important to note that Cragg has been accepted and rejected by a wide range of Christians from varying theological backgrounds, liberal and

---

4) Jones, 'Smith and Cragg on Islam,' p. i.
By focusing on one clear theological strand, Christian Scriptures, we will analyse Cragg’s writings in the light of consistency within his own Christian position. What does he overtly state that he does with Christian Scriptures, and what does he really do, are the two questions constantly before us. While Cragg should not lightly be categorised as being only an evangelical, the topic of Christian Scriptures is one of special interest to evangelicals. Thus in the thesis we particularly consider the claim of scholars and adherents alike that Cragg has theological leanings which tie him well into line with traditional, orthodox interpretation of Christian Scriptures.

Fourthly, this thesis will consider some implications for Christians in Cragg’s approach to Christian Scriptures in Muslim culture. This single, analysed strand is thus woven back into a broader picture where again our assessment can be compared and contrasted to other treatments of Cragg.

Finally, our entire approach is never far from what Cragg calls theology in cross-reference. In an introduction to a book whose audience would not at all necessarily be Christian Cragg writes

Have Christians, either in theology or in friendship, yet sufficiently realized how integral to their own thinking are the essential implications of Islam? Have Muslims yet seen how integral to their concern for an adequate monotheism, in faith and fact, are the Christian criteria of God as love, vulnerable to man in evil and, thereby self-consistently ultimate in redemption and grace? (‘Introduction,’ We Believe in One God, 1979, ix).

---

* In the beginning of Chapter 2 we have listed a number of examples of scholars in the first five footnotes who are both positive and negative. They include: Norman Daniel, Syed Vahiduddin, Colin Chapman, A. L. Tibawi, Charles Adams and Wilfred Cantwell Smith.
Similarly, in an introduction to a book whose audience was likely to be Christian, with the possibility that sincere Muslims might also be reading in he writes

When [Christians] have possessed [Jesus] as patrons rather than as servants, as admirers rather than as lovers, they have obscured him to themselves and to the world. . . . Or it has happened that Christians have portrayed a Christ in their own image, making him the focus of attitudes which reflected their own wishes or their own culture. . . . perhaps Christians know him not, because they are partisan in describing him. There have been many controversies in history, and these have gathered to themselves strenuous and sometimes bitter attitudes of heart.

Or there are those outside the Christian communities who do not know the One who stands among them, for the reason that an incomplete picture has obstructed the full One. . . . So there is a partial knowledge of Jesus which impedes the full one. It is as if a rich harvest was on its way to market and was waylaid en route so that only a fraction of its wealth got through to the fair where men were waiting to possess it. . . . To learn about Jesus is truly a right enterprise for all who love their Qur’an for it is this book which requires us to ‘take him for a sign’ (‘Preface’ in Jesus. The Life of the Messiah, 1974, vii-x).

The above demonstrate Cragg can have different emphases depending on the audience, but in each case he seeks to break down interpretations which needlessly divide and find those which have a common ground to bring the two faiths closer together. Much work has been done in assessing how well he has done this with Islam. This thesis makes an assessment of the extent to which Cragg is able to accommodate Christian Scriptures in this theological process, but leaves unanswered the question of the fairness of his approach to Islam.
2. Kenneth Cragg's Approach to Scripture in Islam

There are those who praise Cragg for his attempts at significant Christian engagement with Islam and particularly his interpretative approach to the Qur'an. Norman Daniel writes, 'His writings are probably the most penetrating analyses of [the Qur'an] in English.' There are Muslims, too, who hold him in high regard. Similarly, some Christians, both conservative and liberal, express enthusiasm and claim benefit from his writings. On the other hand Cragg has been vilified by some reviewers for his approach to Islam and its Scripture, the Qur'an. This could be expected from conservative Muslims but other categories, including liberal Muslims, conservative and liberal Christians as well as secular scholars, are also critical. For example in 1976, shortly after Cragg's landmark books on the Qur'an, The Event of the Qur'an and The Mind of the Qur'an, Charles Adams made a critique.

[There is] from the scholarly standpoint, a fundamental flaw in his efforts. Cragg's argument is developed by deliberately seeking and finding Christian meanings in Islamic experiences and doctrines. . . . Such a manner of reasoning does extreme violence to the historical reality of the Islamic tradition by forcing it into categories of interpretation and meaning drawn from a different historical stream of piety and experience. That which Cragg describes is in the final analysis

---

not Islam but the product of his own wishful, though doubtless sincere, religious striving.\[^{5}\]

Adams further notes that, 'As a way of looking at the world and at the nature and significance of human existence, Islam has a peculiar character of its own.'\[^{6}\] Cragg, according to him, utterly misses Islam's 'peculiar character' by trying to force his own Christian understanding onto this Islamic world view. Shabbir Akhtar makes a similar charge. He critiqued *Muhammad and the Christian* where Cragg quotes him as saying that it was 'marred by Christian theological preconceptions that militated against impartial enquiry.'\[^{7}\]

It is true that Cragg approaches the Qur'ān fully self-consciously as a dedicated Christian. He makes no other claims as he seeks to understand Islam and bring understanding between Christianity and Islam. He has written extensively on the Qur'ān. His early work consisted of commentary and interpretation. Later he even translated and published major portions of the Qur'ān, selecting passages and arranging them according to themes he believed were significant for communicating his theological perspective (*Readings in the Qur'ān* 1988). Yet his sincere attempt at a compassionate analysis comes across to people such as Charles Adams as a misrepresentation of Islam.


\[^{6}\] Emphasis mine; ibid.

\[^{7}\] Shabbir Akhtar, *A Faith for All Seasons*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990, 169, as quoted in *Faith and Life Negotiate* 1994, 313, n. 25. Although well in keeping with the spirit of Akhtar's general approach (p. 180, 241), we did not find this wording in the original source quoted by Cragg. We have used it because it is an accurate and concise summary.
The polarised responses to Cragg's writings on the Qur'an indicate that there are differing suppositions regarding what is a valid methodology for interpretation. Although this is an obvious observation, surprisingly little has been written to address the question of Cragg's methodology. In the majority of instances, his methodology is assumed while his content is challenged. This chapter critiques Cragg's interpretative approach to Scripture in Islam as well as highlighting points of Quranic interpretation which carry over to his theology of Christian Scriptures.

Two other issues are also briefly covered in this chapter. They are 1) other written traditions in Islam apart from the Qur'an, and, 2) Muslim understanding of Christian Scriptures.

2.1 Cragg's Interpretative Method

A good place to begin an analysis of Cragg's interpretative approach to the Qur'an is his response to critiques made of his work. Cragg answered the charge of Adams and others\(^8\) in the introductory chapters to *Muhammad and the Christian* 1984 (p. 12). As he became aware of critics' perceptions, he went to some pains, not just in this book but in later writings as well, to demonstrate his understanding of traditional interpretations of the Qur'an and then to argue the validity of his doing his interpretation differently. Thus Cragg fully recognises, and on one level accepts, the traditional understanding of the

---

Qur'ān, its 114 Surahs, revealed as the direct word of God to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of just twenty-three years, and gathered into one unified book within twenty years of the Prophet's death during the caliphate of Uthman (the third Caliph). He summarises this view clearly in one place.

There is no doubt that the classical view of the Muslim Scripture, assumed and aggravated by orthodox exegesis, is of a supernaturally revealed corpus of words, vouchsafed to an illiterate Prophet, constituting a final, and single, miracle of eloquence and guidance, inalienably Arabic in form, untranslatable in its Qurānicity and the unquestionable source of all authority in all the matters, doctrinal, social, legal, biographical, with which it deals (Counsels in Contemporary Islam 1965, 168).

Despite his ready admission that traditional Muslim interpretation holds such a rigid position, Cragg argues that it reasonably need not be so. 'The Qur'ān itself may be taken as the surest emancipator of its contents from their own incubus of dogma and discipleship' (Counsels in Contemporary Islam 1965, 168). In other words, the Qur'ān itself is the best defence for its more liberal interpretation. As an outsider, he is not bound, as Muslims may feel bound, by traditional approaches and thus he may have something to offer in helping to explain how Muslims can understand their Qur'ān differently (see 2.2.3). In later writing, however, when he responds to his critics, he acknowledges the danger of outside interpretation of the Qur'ān.

In thus attempting to see Islam with the insider's eyes, as a condition of being ready for the question of Muhammad, there is one important aspect requiring deliberate care. The Christian must beware of subjecting the autonomy of Islamic faith and Muslim integrity to criteria from Christianity which Islam's own premises explicitly or implicitly exclude (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 12).
Cragg’s critics accuse him of doing just what he warns against in this quote. Cragg himself claims to be self-aware enough not to compromise the integrity of Muslim autonomy.

Is Cragg’s interpretative approach what he says it is or are the charges against him substantive? Though Cragg goes so far as to acknowledge that ‘Islam in the end must be what Muslims say’ (*Counselling in Contemporary Islam* 1965, 12), he quickly qualifies such a statement by asking ‘which Muslims?’ Just because rigid, inflexible interpretation is the orthodox view of the majority who are religious authorities in Islam does not mean that is the way it should stay, according to Cragg. He is able to find Muslims, albeit only a few, who can agree with him.\(^9\)

Cragg, though noting the rigid traditional view of the Qur’an as quoted above, argues for a more open interpretation that is not just appropriate for Christians and other outsiders coming to the Qur’an but also has validity for Muslims as well.

There are, indeed, many points at which the Qur’an itself encourages intelligent investigation and calls upon hearers and readers for *tadabbur*, or mature reflection (4.82; 47.24). Even outright dogmatists tend to argue for their stance. So there is nothing improper in reverently inquiring into *Wahy* [inspiration] (*Muhammad and the Christian* 1984, 82).

---

\(^9\) For example, seven of the eight Muslims Cragg reviews in his *The Pen and the Faith* (1985) would be ones that he feels could constructively interact with his ideas. Some are contemporary writers while others are near contemporary. Included are Egyptians Kamil Husain and Najib Mahfuz and Pakistani Fazlur Rahman recently of University of Chicago. Not included is Pakistani Daud Rahbar for whom Cragg had high hopes of ongoing dialogue to test and develop ideas but who to Cragg’s expressed consternation became a Christian (Personal conversation with Cragg Oxford, 26 August, 1994 and Daud Rahbar’s account of his response in *Memories and*...
Below we illustrate with an example of how Cragg goes about his interpretative approach.

2.1.1 An example of Cragg’s exegesis: Surah 3:7

First we have chosen Surah 3:7 because Cragg’s interpretation of it demonstrates his theological approach to the Qur’ān. Secondly, Cragg goes into more detail on its exegesis than almost any other passage, devoting an entire chapter of a book to it (‘The Explicit and the Implicit’, Mind of the Qur’ān 1973, 38-53). Thirdly, it is one of the more frequently quoted Quranic passages in Cragg’s writings and thus an evidence that he attaches great significance to his interpretation of its meaning.10

> It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it; all is from our Lord’; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.11


10 For example in addition to the chapter in The Mind of the Qur’ān, see also Call of the Minaret 1956, 48; House of Islam 1969, 40; Pen and the Faith 1985, 2, 23; Readings in the Qur’ān 1988, 277; Troubled by Truth 1992, 198, 298, n. 17; Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 312, n. 16; Lively Credentials of God 1995, 6.

We confine our treatment of the passage to the key words which Cragg focuses on. Above they are translated by Arberry as 'verses clear' (ayât muhkamât, fem. pl. of muhkam, from the root hukam meaning 'decision' or 'judgement')\(^{12}\) and 'ambiguous' (mutashâbihât, fem. pl. of mutashâbih, from the root shubha meaning 'obscurity' or 'vagueness').\(^{13}\)

For Muslim interpretation of Surah 3:7 we consider two: an orthodox Sunni Muslim, Maududi, and an Ahmadi, Alhaj, considered to be heretical by many Muslim groups. Maududi translates the key words as 'clear and lucid' versus 'ambiguous'. His commentary on it is:

> Those who seek the Truth and do not hanker after the satisfaction of their egocentric quest for exotic superfluities, will be satisfied with the dim vision of reality derived from these [ambiguous] verses. They will concentrate their attention instead on the clear and lucid 'core' verses of the Qur'ân. It will be left to those who are either out to make mischief and mislead people or who have an abnormal passion for superfluities to devote their attention to hair-splitting discussions about the contents of the 'ambiguous' verses.\(^{14}\)

Alhaj has a similar translation which goes into the various possibilities for meaning in the Arabic. His translation is 'decisive' versus 'susceptible of different interpretations'. The example he uses to illustrate those who corrupt and do not follow the 'decisive' meanings is that of the Christians. The simple

---


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 454.

and straightforward faith of Jesus was transformed out of all recognition, the 
mutashābihât being given the place of muḥkam.¹⁵ His commentary is

It is to such objectionable practices that allusion is made in this verse, 
which lays down the golden rule that, in order to prove a controversial 
point, the decisive and clearly worded parts of a scripture should be 
taken into consideration . . . and the passage should be so interpreted as 
to make it harmonize with the decisive and clearly worded parts of the 
text.¹⁶

For both the Qur'ān warns against those who build, their religious 
understanding on Quranic verses which are not altogether clear in order to fit 
their own point of view. ‘Stick with what is clear as only God knows the bits 
that are unclear’, would be a quite usual Muslim application of this verse and 
the two or three which follow it.

Cragg’s ideas about the meaning of Surah 3:7 have developed over time. In his 
earlier exegesis he interprets the verse in a way that is not far from Maududi 
and Alhaj above.

The most important single principle of commentary yielded by the 
Qur'ān itself is in Surah 3:7, which reads: ‘. . . the Book, some of whose 
verses are decisive being of the essence of the Book, and others, which 
are ambiguous.’ The following verses go on to suggest that the 
‘ambiguous’ verses attract dissidents and pretentious exegetes, who need 
to remember that finally ‘interpretation’ is known only to God (House 
of Islam 1969, 40).

Later Cragg develops an interpretation which he uses to argue for the 
possibility of freer interpretation of the Qur'ān in order for it to have greater 
relevance for today. He now translates the text as meaning, ‘He it is who has

¹⁵ Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad Alhaj, The Holy Qur’ān with English Translation and 
¹⁶ Ibid., 367
sent down to thee the Book, wherein are verses that are explicit. These constitute the matter of the Book. There are also other verses which are implicit' (emphasis mine; *Mind of the Qur'ân* 1973, 39).

Cragg interprets *muhkamât* as ‘explicit’ and *mutashâbihât* as ‘implicit’. As the meaning of these words has some uncertainty Cragg gives a list of possibilities. Yet none of them are ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ (*Mind of the Qur'ân* 1973, 40). All are more closely related to the above root forms. Cragg justifies his translation.

But, given this specific sense of the two words, there is need to see the distinction as something that is always qualified and never absolute. Hence the preference for ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ as translations. One cannot exclude factuality from the intention of the implicit type of statement: nor can one escape subtlety in what would be accounted explicit (*Mind of the Qur'ân* 1973, 41).

To be fair, Cragg does acknowledge the narrow base on which this argument is founded and concedes it to be a paraphrase in meaning. — although he uses the word ‘translate’ earlier (above).

This, to be sure, is no more than a broad paraphrase of a single, significant clause. It may, nevertheless, be reasonably understood as inviting a contemporary reckoning with the Qur'ân that is loyal to the generations of the past in their reverence and to the present in its crisis (*Mind of the Qur'ân* 1973, 53).

Fifteen years later Cragg translates Surah 3:7 more conventionally.

‘There are revelations with it which are quite categorical and explicit. These are the Book in its essential meaning and nature. Other verses employ metaphor and analogy’ (*Readings in the Qur'ân* 1988, 277).

---

17 The two word lists are: categorical, clear, definitive, precise, perspicuous, literal, decisive — as opposed to — allegorical, conjectural, figurative, metaphorical, allusive, analogical,
One cannot help but wonder if this translation came about because of critiques of his methodology in *The Mind of the Qur'ân* (1973). Even in this more conventional rendering there is an unavoidable sense, however, of a theological slant ('metaphor' and 'analogy') that is outside the generally accepted Arberry translation (above) or the interpretation of Muslim commentators in the two examples we gave above.

Cragg's unusual approach to translation of Surah 3:7 in *The Mind of the Qur'ân* leads to an idiosyncratic and individual interpretation of a verse whose meaning is not entirely clear. This slant serves the purpose for Cragg of opening the possibility for broader, non-traditional interpretation of the Qur'ân. His argument, however, is not well served by his exegesis. As we have seen, this verse has been interpreted conservatively by Muslim commentators in a way which calls readers to avoid the uncertain and build upon the certain. Cragg argues almost the exact opposite. It is worth noting that Cragg's exegetical methodology in approaching the meanings of the key words in Surah 3:7 is remarkably similar to the way he interprets the Greek words ἐκπέτασις and ἀποδοχῆ from the New Testament which he uses to develop his theme of 'hospitality of the Gospel' (7.4.1, 7.4.2).

2.1.2 A contrasting exegetical methodology

Cragg's methodology shown above stands in contrast to that of a Quranic interpreter such as Jane McAuliffe. McAuliffe is another western, non-

susceptible of different interpretations (*Mind of the Qur'ân* 1973, 40).

Muslim scholar who has studied, translated and interpreted some Quranic verses. She also has an interest in and makes application to at least one aspect of Christian-Muslim relations by focusing her study on Quranic verses which make positive reference to Christians.

On the surface there are verses in the Qur'an which are contradictory about Christians; some are positive and some are negative. McAuliffe does exegesis on seven passages which seem, on the surface, to be positive (Surahs 2:62; 3:55; 3:199; 5:66; 5:83-85; 28:52-55; 57:27).

McAuliffe's methodology is focused on learning what Muslims have believed the meaning of the verses to be. She does this by first establishing the basis of tafsir (Quranic exegesis) through a review of its formative, classical and modern periods. Then, through a careful study of the tafsir on these verses throughout these periods, she seeks to understand their context in order to reconstruct original Quranic meaning. The conclusion of her exegesis is that tafsir testimony for the passages clearly establishes that what the Qur'an meant by Christians was a special category of people who had or would have had, given opportunity, a right response to the prophet Muhammad. They also had the uncorrupted Scriptures. This is contrary to a superficial or uncritical reading. Thus McAuliffe concludes 'Quranic Christians — those Christians whom the Qur'an is understood to commend, are neither the historical nor the living community of people who call themselves Christians.'

\[19\] Ibid., 287.
This is a more recent turn in scholarship, earlier Montgomery Watt argues for the possibility that the Quranic attacks on Christianity are directed toward heresies in Christianity and not orthodox Christianity. In conclusion it may be suggested that, if the main contention of this paper is sound, namely, that there is not primary attack on Christianity in the Qur'an, then widespread realization of this point has profound implications for the present and future relations of Islam and Christianity.

If the above were true, it would mean there are only positive references to true Christianity in the Qur'an, quite the opposite of McAuliffe's findings. Unlike McAuliffe, however, he did not do it through a careful analysis of *tafsir*. Interestingly, though dealing extensively with the portrayal of Jesus in the Qur'an, Cragg does not comment much on these verses, noting very early in his writing that there are both positive and negative references to Christians. He goes on to say that 'It is hard to resist the impression that Muhammad's attitude changed, when he discovered that his claims failed to receive the hospitable welcome he had first expected from the people of the Book' (*Call of the Minaret* 1956, 261). The point is that neither Cragg nor Watt utilised the same meticulous methodology in studying Muslim sources that McAuliffe has in order to search for original intent.

---

20 A common, more confrontational interpretation of the negative references towards Christians contained in the Medinon Surahs is that the Prophet Muhammad by then had become more of a politician bent on building his party and power base.

2.1.3 Implications of Cragg's methodology in Quranic interpretation

McAuliffe's methodology in exegesis contrasts with Cragg's in the examples we have seen. Though McAuliffe's surprising concluding interpretation is of some value to this thesis, we do not deal with it as we have not been comparing exegesis of the same or similar passages. Rather we note the differing exegetical methods utilised for interpreting the Qur'an. McAuliffe has chosen verses from the Qur'an which have direct bearing on Muslim-Christian relations, an obvious concern in today's world. Their interpretation is often highly charged and even utilised polemically. Nevertheless she tries not to come to the Qur'an and Islam with a particular theology. Instead she seeks to understand the tradition of interpretation (tafsîr) for the passages along with the reasons why those verses have been interpreted in that way. Only then does she move into particular application. Cragg's methodology is more speculative and is influenced by his own theological perspective.

2.1.3.1 Contextualised Gospel in the Qur'an

We now argue that Cragg's methodology is one which interprets the Qur'an through Christian eyes. In a sense that is a tautology as he claims nothing else, but there are implications. Such an approach has both strengths and weaknesses. The strength is that it frees him to see new things in the text. When people with differing belief systems about the Bible study it together they often see things they had not seen previously. So Cragg's Christian
approach to the Qur'ān can bring new insights even to Muslims whose belief system about the book is quite set.

The weakness is the danger of misinterpreting the meaning and original intent of the passage. Cragg of course is aware of this (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 12 as quoted above) but still, according to some such as Adams, falls into the trap of misrepresenting Islam. Because Cragg reads the Qur'ān through Christian eyes he sometimes interprets parts in an individual or idiosyncratic manner. We have seen that Surah 3:7 is an example. Cragg's Christian approach to the Qur'ān is a form of theological contextualisation. By contextualisation we mean 'a process by which the gospel is shown to be relevant in a given sociocultural context.'²² Cragg seeks to show the relevance of his understanding of the Gospel in the religious context of Islam to both Christians and Muslims. Norman Daniel assesses Cragg's approach, noting that Cragg 'has taught Christians to learn their own religion from the Qur'ān.'²³ There is validity in Cragg's theological method when it is assessed on the basis of being a contextualisation of the Christian Gospel in Muslim culture. Cragg finds a Christian affinity in the Qur'ān. 'It rapidly became conclusively clear to me that the Qur'ān had dimensions of meaning that Christians ought to share fully and thankfully' (as quoted above in 2.1.3.2 Readings in the Qur'ān 1988, 9). These include such things as creation, the caliphate of man and aspects of prophethood. This thesis picks them up in relevant places. Thus Cragg set out to communicate his findings. 'In four

widely spaced books . . . I tried to present what might be called the Christian affinity with the Muslim Scripture and to argue spiritual community in some areas of its meaning' (Readings in the Qur'an 1988, 10). Cragg is not alone in this approach. Others like Basaetti-Sani (Koran in the Light of Christ) have engaged in contextualisation. But Cragg is remarkably close to another who clearly contextualises. We introduce him to demonstrate.

Fuad Accad (d.1994) was a Lebanese Christian with the life-long goal of Muslim evangelism. He developed a methodology of using the Qur'an as 'a bridge to the cross' which in many respects has an interpretative approach to the Qur'an that is strikingly similar to Cragg's. Perhaps aspects were even borrowed from him. While Cragg would see his mission as a mission to the mind of Islam and not one which seeks the conversion of the individual Muslim, Accad's is the opposite. His mission is clearly to the individual Muslim, whose conversion to Christianity he believes is important. Cragg and Accad have a common ground in one major area in their approach to the Qur'an, that is, that they argue that Muslim commentators have not interpreted the Qur'an correctly.

Most translations of the Qur'an add traditional Muslim interpretation, injecting what Muslim scholars have taught over the years. Some verses about Christ and the Bible are changed to the point of meaning something totally different from the original Arabic of the Qur'an. . . .

I consider the most accurate English translation . . . to be . . . Arberry['s]. But Arberry falls into the same kind of interpretative errors I just described, even though he was scholarly in his approach.24

Studies [CNAA], 1991, 2.
23 Daniel, Islam and the West, 329.
Cragg, too, sees that given a 'true' interpretation, the Qur'an is much more compatible with Christian belief than previously has been thought by most Muslims or Christians. For example, this is a point Cragg makes as a major premise in his book *Returning to Mount Hira* where he goes back to the Qur'an's origins and suggests that it originally had a more hospitable outlook towards other faiths than the one which has developed historically in Islam. The contextualisation point which we make above, however, is perhaps more noticeable in Accad because of his motivation for the conversion of Muslims. Accad as a popularist does what Cragg does as a scholar. Their understanding of the Christian faith is different and so they see different aspects of the Qur'an which are hospitable to Christianity, but there is significant overlap in their methodologies.

Cragg's methodology becomes suspect if it is assessed on the basis of being a 'true', unbiased representation of Islam. On the other hand if the contextualisation of the Gospel is a valid framework for analysing Cragg's writings (which we argue to some degree it is), it makes Cragg's treatment of his own Christian Scriptures a more critical issue than previously has been given thought by others who have critiqued his work. What is this gospel for which he finds pointers in the Qur'an? What is the role of Christian Scriptures in it? These are questions we take up later (Ch. 4-8).

2.1.3.2 The Qur'an as Scripture for Christians

There is no doubt that Cragg accepts the validity of the Qur'an as Scripture for Muslims, despite the problems that may raise for Christians. Our question now is, how far it is Scripture for others, including Christians? Cragg writes
extensively, justifying what he considers to be a 'fair' approach on the part of non-Muslims to the Qur'an. Several of his major works devote a significant portion of their introductory chapters to giving a rationale for how Christians can and should 'possess' the Qur'an.

We live in a perplexity of conscious pluralism, in what some have called an 'ecumene of religions.' . . . In this ambiguous situation the Qur'an cannot be isolated within Islam. . . . As 'a mercy to the worlds', Muhammad and the Qur'an cannot well be confined within Islam, nor their significance withheld from those who do not assent to its beliefs. . . . It rapidly became conclusively clear to me that the Qur'an had dimensions of meaning that Christians ought to share fully and thankfully, and that it was their duty to counter the adverse judgements to which past attitudes had been prone (Readings in the Qur'an 1988, 9). 25

In a parallel but different vein, Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains the shortcomings of Western scholarship in Islam. 'The Qur'an . . . was seen by the West as not truly scripture; certainly not primarily scripture; and in effect, as not scripture at all. It was studied and treated not as scripture, but as any other book.' 26 One's attitude towards the Qur'an must be right for a person to appreciate it. ' . . . to understand the Qur'an as scripture one must recognise it as scripture.' 27

This, in essence, Cragg does (in all but his earliest writings).

It is substantially agreed that the Qur'an as we have it truly constitutes the deliverances of Muhammad in the distinctive state of wahy [inspiration/ revelation] (as differentiated from what became tradition) and does so comprehensively and exclusively. That confident conviction turns on Muhammad's unique role and on the physical and

25 See other examples in, Alive to God 1970, viii. 'But we shall most truly care for what involves a loyal controversy, if we genuinely possess in common what is properly so.' or, The Mind of the Qur'an 1973, 15.
26 Smith, What is Scripture? 69.
27 Ibid.
psychic features which marked it. His hearers seem to have known when he was, so to speak, 'in Quranic capacity' and when not. For reasons both practical and historical the outside reader is well advised to share the Muslim assurance . . . (Readings in the Qur'an 1988, 26).

The issue, however, is more than one of accepting the Muslim position. In what sense is it scripture for the non-Muslim and particularly the Christian?

Cragg in no way minimises the severity of the problem.

Accordingly, it has long been a Christian difficulty to acknowledge the later [Qur'an] when it is inconsistent with the earlier [Jesus Christ], given the conviction that the 'earlier' is itself 'final' and definitive. How can one ascribe authenticity to that which so confidently purports to displace, or otherwise improve upon, 'the Word made flesh'? (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 92).

Cragg seeks to solve this problem in a way that is reminiscent of a theological concept expounded a few years earlier by Charles Kraft of Fuller Theological Seminary in California. Basically Kraft's idea is that God may continue to save some people in the same way he did in Old Testament times (although we cannot know if he really will in any specific instance).

We postulate that God's method and message are today the same as they always have been with respect to those who may be chronologically AD but informationally BC. That is, since God's method and message have not changed, he must interact with those who are today informationally like Old Testament peoples on the same basis as that which he employed with those peoples. The Scriptures give us ample insight into these matters. This insight, then, is contemporarily applicable, not merely of historical interest.28

Cragg makes a similar point by separating 'chronology' from 'place' where theological understanding may not have been fully developed. Cragg's own words express it clearly. Answering his own question above, Cragg writes

---

28 Emphasis original; Charles H. Kraft, Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologising in Cross-Cultural Perspective. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979, 402. See also 253-257 for a full explanation of the model he calls 'Informationally BC'.
One cannot assess the prophethood of Muhammad merely by noting 'when' it is. 'Where' is critical.... In estimating Muhammad's role in seventh-century (AD) Mecca/Medina one has to consider not only the years but the cities, not simply the date but the locale. In cultic terms the parallel would be closer with the Samaria of Elijah than with the Alexandria of Athanasius or the Jerusalem of Jesus. Prophetic meanings that might seem retrogressive by simple time criteria may be progressive by those of place and culture (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 92).

Kraft is, perhaps, more immediately logically consistent than Cragg, by overtly concluding that God can still provide salvation in the same way as happened in the Old Testament. According to Jones (Ch. 1), Cragg does not clearly make this shift. Implications of this for Cragg's interpretation of Christian Scriptures are quite far-reaching. It affects his view of the Old Testament where we take up this specific point again (5.2). This change in perspective can also be argued to have effected change in his 'call to retrieval' in The Call of the Minaret (7.1.1).

Cragg and Accad are not alone in wanting an interpretation of the Qur'an freed from tradition and so employing a methodology to that end. Lamb, in considering if Cragg's interpretation is what Muslims themselves conclude, notes that it is more in keeping with Sufi mysticism and some modern Muslim writers than it is with traditional interpretation. What Lamb fails to note is the history and reasons for this new Muslim interpretation. Cragg's interpretation fits what John Esposito labels as the neo-traditionalists in Islam such as Maududi of Pakistan. With the demise of even the pretence of a symbolic universal Caliphate in Turkey following World War I, and rising nationalism in the Muslim world, the neo-traditionalists looked back to the

29 Lamb, Call to Retrieval, 39.
Qur'ān and the Sunnah for a fully Islamic renewal through reinterpretation. The meaning of the khalīfah was one.

Thus the idea of the ‘caliphate of man’ (Privilege of Man 1968, 27) while not necessarily in the mainstream of Muslim interpretation of the Qur'ān, was not new with Cragg. There is some classical Muslim discussion of humanity as khalīfah but it was not a common interpretation coming into the twentieth century. More recently Maududi and others were arguing for such but from within Islam thirty-one (though they obviously would disagree with Cragg in other areas). Cragg’s approach to the Qur'ān bears some resemblance to Esposito’s category of the neo-traditionalists, though his ideas have better acceptance amongst Muslim modernists.

2.2 The Qur'ān as a Scripture for the Arabs

The Arabic character of the Qur'ān has wide ranging significance for Cragg. It is not a ‘way to assert some mundane or secular appeal to “nationality” in the modern sense’ (Event of the Qur'ān 1971, 71). Rather it is the most important key to a proper understanding of the Qur'ān. For him, the ‘best point of departure in a study of the Qur'ān is from the fact of its being Arabic’ (House of Islam 1969, 12). It is much more than simply the chance language of communication.

31 Ibid., 8.
The Qur'an is understood to say what it says in an inseparable identity with how it says it. It constitutes a what and a how in indissoluble marriage. Its eloquence is the flow of a fountain, in whose force is its purpose. Both are 'revelation'. It is not a cistern which contrivance has accumulated (Event of the Qur'an 1971, 46).

His approach can best be summed up with the statement, 'There can be no doubt that the Qur'an was a supreme sacrament of Arabness as well as of Arabicity' (Event of the Qur'an 1971, 54). This Arabic nature of the Qur'an has a variety of implications for Cragg. We note three which are significant to our thesis.

2.2.1 The Prophet as ummi (illiterate)

Cragg acknowledges that most traditional interpretation of Surah 7.157-8 asserts that the Prophet was illiterate, giving further credence to the 'miracle' of the Qur'an as divine revelation directly from God with no human interference. He is fully aware of the significance of this for traditional Muslims. 'Arabic eloquence, understood as characterising "an illiterate prophet" (Surah 7: 157 and 158) lay at the heart of [the Qur'an’s] credentials as the miracle of wahy, or inspiration' (Mind of the Qur'an 1973, 17). In both early and later writing, however, Cragg argues for a less common interpretation of these verses. Ummi has not always been interpreted as 'illiterate'. Cragg builds on this minority understanding of al-nabi al-ummî (illiterate prophet). 'A more satisfactory understanding of Muhammad's descriptive ummi...shifts the significance from bare "illiteracy" to "lack of native Scripture" (a lack which
his vocation was steadily making good)' (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 86).

Cragg argues this on the basis that ‘[ummi] is an adjective predicative of Muhammad’s mission rather than descriptive of his person’ (Event of the Qur’an 1971, 59). Thus

‘The unlettered Prophet is ‘the Prophet for the [as yet] unscriptured’. There were antecedent Scriptures and there were peoples whom those Scriptures had ‘made’. Arabs were not among them. Nor, for profound reasons, were those existing Scriptures satisfactory or efficacious to confer Arab identity and unity. Being already possessed elsewhere those books were, we may say, pre-empted, essentially unavailable for the necessary Arab role (Event of the Qur’an 1971, 59).

Cragg goes to considerable pains to make this point not in order somehow to demythologise the Qur’an by making it the work of a person rather than God. Rather it is critical to his understanding of how the Qur’an may genuinely be interpreted. For Cragg revelation is situational with an interaction between both the giver (God) and the receiver (Prophet and, later, the people). Revelation is not revelation unless it is received (see 4.5.2.3). Revelation, in the case of the Qur’an, would not be interactive if it was received in a passive manner, as many Muslims have traditionally understood. Although housed in slightly different terminology, Accad makes the same point about ummi for almost the same reason. ³² This point is of significance for our later discussion of Cragg’s understanding of the Bible and revelation. This concept of ‘a scripture for the Arabs’ is part of the basis for Cragg’s view of the ethnicity of

³² Accad, Building Bridges, 66.
the Old Testament and of the way other scriptures can play a role which points to the Christ of the New Testament (see 5.2).

Thus a proper understanding of ummi is related to the nature of the Qur’ân as Arab, not because it is a demonstration of a miracle of divine intervention passed down to someone who could neither read nor write. Rather its true meaning is that it is a scripture for a people who have none. Cragg even goes so far as to note that the Bible had not yet been translated into Arabic and even if it had, its Jewish precedent made it so that it could not be owned by the Arabs, leading to the necessity of the Qur’ân even from a Christian perspective (Mind of the Qur’ân 1973, 17-18).

2.2.2 Language as revelation

For the Semite, language is an art: how something is said can be as important or even more important than what is said. The same is true for Quranic Arabic. In a preface to an introductory book on Islam Cragg comments on a complex, circular but ornate, calligraphic rendering of a Quranic verse.

The circle of Arabic script presents a puzzling face. Its meaning is opaque, indeed impenetrable, without the needed clues. It suggests to the uninitiated a closed world, constituted to exclude access to itself (Islam from Within 1980, xiii).

Indeed, even for those who have learned to read Arabic, such stylised calligraphy is impossible to decipher without initiation into the art form and instruction about how to read it. This calligraphy is a human rendering of a theological understanding of one aspect of the Qur’ân, Arabic as the language
of revelation. ‘Calligraphy is the first sacred duty of the pen’ (*Pen and the Faith*
1985, 1). Without intimately knowing the Arabic of the Qur’ān, one cannot
really know the Qur’ān. Thus Cragg observes, ‘The literary quality of the Qur’ān
has largely to be taken on trust by the newcomer and the stranger’ (*Event of the
Qur’ān* 1971, 53). Strangers are not able to investigate for themselves. The use
of the language itself conveys a form of revelation for the Muslim.

The Islamic Scripture involves a very special relation of language to
meaning. . . . [wahy, or inspiration] gave rise to the I’jāz or
incomparability, of the book, understood as a literary matchlessness
which attested its divine source and authority. So its being Arabic was,
and is, inseparable from its being Qur’ān (*Mind of the Qur’ān* 1973, 17).

This Arabic has a poetic quality which, according to Cragg, has revelatory
qualities about it. ‘To cherish the Qur’ān is to esteem the letters of the art and
the art of letters’ (*Event of the Qur’ān* 1971, 52-3). But Cragg does go one step
further. ‘“Poetry is the subject of a poem.” One might almost be tempted to
conclude similarly that the theme of the Scripture is The Scripture’ (*Mind of
the Qur’ān* 1973, 53). ‘It may be doubted whether, in last analysis, prophecy has
ever been other than poetic’ (*Event of the Qur’ān* 1971, 45).

D’Souza charges Cragg with misrepresenting the Qur’ān by equating aspects of
Quramic revelation with poetry. The Qur’ān by its own assessment has a quality
‘surpassing poetical worth’.33 To infer that revelation is poetic attributes a
greater role to the Prophet Muhammad than do Muslims, according to
D’Souza. But Cragg’s assessments are taken from early Muslims and Cragg
insists ‘a sound may be truer than reason’ (*Event of the Qur’ān* 1971, 45). His

33 D’Souza, ‘Christian Approaches to Islam’, 50.
clear interpretation is that 'Revelation, we may say, is a linguistic as well as a
spiritual phenomenon. The Scripture is a miracle of eloquence and diction, as
well as the repository of final truth' (*House of Islam* 1969, 32).

Cragg does not give much credence, as some non-Muslim western scholars
have done, to theories of a high literary tradition preceding the Qur'an in the
Arabian Peninsula. These theories are seen by Muslims as having the effect of
seeing the Qur'an as not that unusual, thus making it a more 'human'
document thereby explaining away the miraculous element which is claimed
to be seen by Muslims in the language of the Qur'an. Cragg insists that he
accepts the Qur'an as the 'miracle' Muslims claim it to be though he urges a
theology of the Qur'an which sees a more active human role in its
development, arguing that this makes it no less divine.

It is also important to note that Cragg's fascination with Sufi (Muslim mystic)
interpretation is partly built on the language of the Qur'an. The words
themselves accomplish an end which is met in Christianity in another way.

An approximate analogy may, at some risk, be found in the Christian
sense of Holy Communion. Here is a partaking sacrament, in which
bread and wine prefigure the event of 'the body broken and the blood
shed' and receiving them prefigures the character of faith. There is
participation by the taking, in the sacramental situation of the exchange.
In its different way, Quranic recital involves the heart and speech of the

34 See for example Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry*, Columbus:
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930. In 1978 the present author observed Nicholson's
book locked up in a glass cabinet in the librarian's office of the History Department library of
University of the Punjab, Lahore. The librarian explained the book had been banned because it
trivialised the miracle of the Qur'an by associating it with a pre-existing high literary
tradition in Arabia. It was not destroyed, lest at some future date it was taken off the banned
list. This was the result of one of but several ideological purges which led to various books being
banned and taken out of libraries in Pakistan.
faithful in taking within himself, and an expression from himself, of what he understands to be the ‘oracles’ of God. He is faithfully doing after him what the Prophet did inclusively, for him and all Muslims, on behalf of God (House of Islam 1969, 42).

This high view of language in revelation, which at least in part comes from the Qur’an, has links for Cragg, not just in Christian practice (as seen above) but also in his view of the Bible as Scripture. This has been influenced in two related but different ways which we introduce below but develop more fully later in the thesis.

First, Cragg tends to overlook common cultural forms in which events and teaching in the Bible are often expressed. For instance, there is surprisingly little in Cragg’s writings on the parables of Jesus. A scholar such as Kenneth Bailey (see 3.7), who does historical exegesis, bases his whole interpretative method on understanding peasant cultural forms. Parables feature prominently in Bailey’s writings and his interpretations are well received by both scholars and Middle Easterners. With one or two significant exceptions, Cragg’s approach minimises this important aspect of Christian Scriptures.

Secondly, Cragg does not interact significantly with the idea of the nature and communicative qualities of the relatively ‘low’ Koine or marketplace Greek of the New Testament. For instance, when Cragg deals with problems of translating the Bible into Arabic, he is inclined toward a ‘high’ Arabic that is

---

35 One notable exception is the Parable of the Prodigal Son which we discuss in Chapter 8. But even in this, the way Cragg interprets does more to prove our point than to negate it.
more, rather than less, comparable to the Quranic Arabic (Arab Christian 1991, 300, n. 9) (See 4.4).

Nevertheless the true meaning of revelation, according to Cragg, can only be known through a proper interpretation. High language which communicates through poetry and analogy, though having power in its very sound, must be interpreted. Cragg believes this has not yet happened in Islam.

The word ‘Qur’an’ means literally ‘reading’ as ‘recital.’ It is a Book to be heard in chant and transcribed in calligraphy. But these arts of possession await the art of interpretation (Pen and the Faith 1985, 1).

Interpretation cannot happen without translation. We now consider how far Cragg sees this as possible with the Qur’an.

2.2.3 Translation

Cragg notes that there are two basic difficulties when it comes to translating the Qur’an. The first is Muslims' own dogma which says that the Qur’an cannot be translated. Cragg acknowledges that traditional belief insists that the Qur’an is untranslatable, but argues that nevertheless it should be translated. The solution to this first question is relatively easy for Cragg, because he sees the answer in the Qur’an.

It is the simple observation that in almost all the passages that refer to ‘an Arabic Qur’an’ intelligibility for the Arabs is the reason, explicit or implied, why it is so... But if the Arabic language of the Qur’an is for its intelligibility to Arabs, then translation, where non-Arabs are involved, becomes imperative. Seen in this sense, the very passages, which justified orthodox persistence in the belief that only Arabic could be ‘Qur’an,’ in fact imply a duty of translation (House of Islam 1969, 32).
Cragg also notes that within the last few decades, translations of the Qur’an have proliferated, commenting that this is a relatively recent development. In the early part of this century, it was still possible to identify virtually all translations of the Qur’an into English and other western languages, something which Samuel Zwemer did. There were not more than twenty-five to thirty and Zwemer noted that almost all of them were the work of ‘Western scholars, Orientalists, and missionaries.’ It should be noted, however, that there were interpretations of the Qur’an into other Muslim languages such as Shah Walliullah’s translation into Urdu in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless it has only been in this century that translation work has become common.

An important transition in Quranic translation came about when official Muslim approval for translation was finally given in 1930 from Al-Azhar in Egypt, one of the oldest and most respected institutions for Islamic higher education in the Muslim world. This permission to translate was given to a Muslim Englishman, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. For many years this was the only English translation of the Qur’an easily available. Today there are many more. Pickthall’s is still in use, however, because of his lofty English style which conveys a sense of dignity. It is interesting to note that this permission was given provided Pickthall did not use the word ‘translation’. The book was entitled ‘The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an’. Many translations of the Qur’an have had similar titles. About this development

---

Cragg reports Pickthall as commenting, 'The position that all translation of the Qurʾān is sinful has been quite abandoned. This is a great step forward' (Counsels in Contemporary Islam 1965, 168-9).

Translation is now readily accepted in orthodox Muslim circles, even if it is not always officially condoned. Many Muslims are now involved in translation in order not to let this task go by default to non-Muslims. Cragg interprets this as one hopeful sign for the future that the modern Muslim world is about to enter a new age of Quranic interpretation. Thus the first hurdle in translation, that of a dogma which forbids it, is rapidly being overcome in the Muslim world.

The second problem with translation, a literary one, is not so easily answered according to Cragg. As we have already noted, he believes that truly to know the Qurʾān, one needs to learn Arabic. Language itself is part of the very essence of the Qurʾān and one cannot appreciate it without access to that language. This is quite in keeping with traditional interpretation. Nevertheless, Cragg's grounds for this understanding are not so much theological as they are pragmatic. Much more is lost in translation of the Qurʾān than in other books.

It is not merely, as with all great literature, that translation is impoverishment even when successful with the sense. It is, further, that its quality is essentially bound up with its whole significance so that each is necessary to the other (Mind of the Qurʾān 1973, 17).

37 Ibid., 176.
Traditional Muslim interpretation, as noted above, has argued on theological grounds for not translating the Qur'an. Nevertheless, translation is utterly necessary if it is to be possessed by the whole world, according to Cragg. This is the Qur'an's own stated intention where it describes itself as a 'mercy to the worlds' (House of Islam 1969, 15). Thus for Cragg a careful rendering not just of words, but of poetic form is important in order to help carry at least some of the impact which is present in the original Arabic. This, of course, poses a problem, one which translators everywhere face.

Translation has to resolve one perennial question: how far may, or does, the receiving language rather than the giving language control the end-result? There is a transaction between them, necessarily, a sort of negotiation in which the shape of one defers to the shape of the other. Vexed questions of vocabulary equivalence belong in this negotiation (Readings in the Qur'an 1988, 48).

Nevertheless, it is important enough as an exercise for Cragg himself to engage in. After years of thought and work, he finally published portions of the Qur'an in 1988 which are his own translation.

Cragg's understanding of language in the Qur'an carries over to his ideas about Bible translation. We later document changes in Cragg from early statements about the purpose of translation in The Call of the Minaret where he stresses the need for common, simple understanding, to a later position articulated in The Arab Christian which is biased towards one 'agreed' work with a high Quranic literary form which could be respected by Muslims familiar with their Qur'an (see 4.4). This latter position is not one which easily incorporates the idea of translations which are geared towards popular idiom, something which
has become quite common in Christianity today, even in the Arab world. The Arabic Living Bible translation is an example.

Thus we note that Cragg sees the Qurʾān through Christian eyes when he argues against the traditional position of the untranslatable nature of the Qurʾān. On the other hand, his view of his own Scriptures has been tempered through his study of the Qurʾān. We later argue that it has led to a 'higher' view of language and translation for the Bible than what can logically be understood from the original form and style of many parts of Christian Scriptures (see 4.4).

2.3 Context of the Qurʾān

Just as traditional Muslim understanding uses the high literary style of the Qurʾān alongside the assertion that the Prophet Muhammad was ummi to attest to its divine nature, so the lack of a context and chronology in the Qurʾān has been used to distance it from the human, demonstrating its divine origins. Thus Cragg notes '... some exegesis strongly urges the dissociation of the contents from their immediate time-context. It is held that the timeless relevance of the text is thereby more surely seen' (Readings in the Qurʾān 1988, 32).

On the surface it may appear that both context and chronology are even more hidden within the Qurʾān than they are in Christian Scriptures. But some
Muslims, albeit a minority, have critically examined the context of the Surahs. The prolific fifteenth century Egyptian commentator Al-Suyūṭī utilised now lost sources to give historical causes of revelation for the various Surahs in his commentary on the Qur'ān. With changing social conditions and the spread of Islam, however, this commentary was ignored by other traditional commentators. Only recently has it been taken up as the debate about shari‘ah (law) has become more prevalent. Not surprisingly, Cragg has noticed Al-Suyūṭī. Cragg argues that context and chronology of the Surahs in the Qur'ān are vitally important.

A far greater effort is needed to delve into the immediate context of Muhammad’s experience of tanzil [the ‘sending down’ of the Qur’ān], to ascertain the connotations among the Qur’ān’s first reciters of the terms it employs and to search in the hinterland of speech, usage and poetry, for the likely and primary significances within its rich and recondite terminology (House of Islam 1969, 170).

The value in doing such study leads to appropriate interpretation in today’s world where issues are different from what they were at the time the Qur’ān was written. One such issue is the whole question of Muslims being allowed to have more than one wife. Though the practice continues in some areas, many modern Muslims argue against it. Cragg notes ‘The famous directive of Surah 4 about appropriate plurality of wives within the limit of four belongs to a context about the care of orphans’ (House of Islam 1969, 173). This is similar to interpretation of Bible passages which contain directives that are culturally out of place today such as women covering their heads in church. Thus understanding the context would lead to an interpretation that bears on the

\[\text{Jalāl al Din Al-Suyūṭī, } Al-Itqān fi 'Ullūm al-Qur'ān. 2 Vol. Cairo ed., 1941. For a modern example where the context in the Qur'ān is important see Fatima Mernissi, Women and Islam: An}\]
question of plurality of wives in the late twentieth century when context issues are different. Cragg is not the only one to use this argument from context in the Qur'ān. Many modern Muslims justify their stand in the same way. Cragg is hopeful changes are happening.

A great turn in Islamic Quranic scholarship may be on the way when it is appreciated that by its own criteria it is a book immersed in events and that its meanings cannot be isolated from them, or carried beyond them, negligently of what they are and what they heard (House of Islam 1969, 172).

Cragg argues that traditional interpretation which ignores time and context is not only unhelpful to scholars by being 'craven and wooden in itself' but is also 'contrary to the Qur'ān' (House of Islam 1969, 172). Thus Cragg argues for a new, other-than-traditional interpretation based on the Qur'ān itself, and in so doing he does not feel tied to the views of traditional exegesis (tafsīr). Traditional exegesis, according to him, has straightjacketed any modern interpretation of the Qur'ān (House of Islam 1969, 172) in keeping with the neo-traditionalists in Islam.

Unlike these neo-traditionalists, however, Cragg insists that a person can understand the Qur'ān in context and still be no less faithful to its 'miracle'. Traditional interpretations, meant to strengthen the faith against unbelievers, have instead set interpretation of the Qur'ān in such a fixed form that not only is it irrelevant for today, but it needlessly blocks dialogue with people of other faiths, such as Christians.

Finally, Cragg argues that the Qur'ān is, and indeed has to be, situational because 'Revelation to history cannot occur outside it. A prophet cannot arise except in a generation and a native land' (Event of the Qur'ān 1971, 112). According to Cragg the very nature of inspiration and revelation is such that the context must be there. This issue is more important than the simple stating of a fact that context demonstrates that there is a historicity about the Muslim faith. Cragg's understanding of revelation and his motivation for theology in cross-reference are two reasons why he argues for a freer Quranic interpretation.

2.4 Inspiration of the Qur'ān

Closely related to the question of context is that of inspiration for Cragg. The suffering role of the Prophet looms large in Cragg's understanding of revelation through inspiration (see 4.5.2.2). Cragg sees themes of this in Islam, not just Christianity, though again he acknowledges that traditional interpretation holds to the belief that 'cestial dictation, rather than inward travail, verifies the Qur'ān as the divine Word' (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 5). In his Muhammad and the Christian Cragg explores whether there is not another way to interpret inspiration of the Qur'ān in order to make it more compatible and so acceptable to Christians.

Christian 'acknowledgement' of Muhammad must deeply interest itself in whether the traditional view of wahy [inspiration], as Muslims have held it, does or does not do justice both to the real phenomenon of the Prophet and to the nature of revelation itself. If it were to be possible, for example, to think of Muhammad much more within the pattern,
say, of Amos in the Bible — in respect, that is, of what prophetic experience meant — then we should have a much livelier ‘dialogue’, and, incidentally, a much more vigorous and productive approach, to the contents of the Qur’an (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 5-6).

By wahy Cragg explains that Muslims mean ‘both the utterance carrying meaning and the enabling that produced the utterance’ (emphasis original; Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 81). This traditional understanding must be overcome in order to have another interpretation. Another Arabic word used to convey aspects of inspiration which are associated with the English word is tanzil (descending) which denotes the actual giving of the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad. Cragg uses a Christian analogy to explain it. ‘Like ‘Incarnation’ in the Christian faith, [tanzil] both denotes in concept and conceals in mystery the divine/human, the eternal/temporal, relationship’ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 83). But he also notes the insistence in Islam on the non-participation of the Prophet in this venture. ‘Within that concept and mystery, it has always been crucial for Muslims to insist that the will and personality of Muhammad do not consciously participate’ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 83).

After arguing that revelation must be interactive and participatory for it to be revelation, Cragg argues for an understanding of wahy which is different from what has been traditional.

Both they and we must surely understand Muhammad as recipient in terms that allow employment to the full of his powers of will and mind, so that Wahy does not have its way by some kind of surreptitious infusion of words to be uttered apart from any living engagement with their sense before or during their infusion. The Qur’an does not need for its authority this thesis about its inspiration. Its worth is more evident for being rid of this incubus. We do not believe that Muhammad had
never heard of Joseph or Moses until the names came to him in the first Wahy that referred to them (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 153).

The argument not only is applied to Christians, the audience to which Muhammad and the Christian is overtly directed, but to Muslims as well. Below we analyse more fully Cragg's treatment of hadîth (Tradition). But as it relates to the questions of inspiration we note that, for Islam, the eternal words of the Qur'ân which have come through wahy and tanzil find situational application and purpose in the hadîth. Cragg, however, sees this as an arbitrary and untenable distinction, believing that it must (also) be interpreted from within the Qur'ân.

In sustaining the message, inwardly as a call and outwardly as a struggle, even though verbally phrased for him by wahy, his character, patience, responses, can hardly be separated from the gist of the words. Tradition in Islam makes personality in Muhammad central to disclosure of divine law(s). Is it really excluded, or excludable, from the Qur'ân? (Returning to Mount Hira' 1994, 124).

Cragg uses his arguments for what he considers to be a right understanding of ummi, translation and context in the Qur'ân to bolster his basic argument that the Qur'ân should be interpreted anew.

2.5 Interpreting the Qur'ân

2.5.1 Traditional Quranic interpretation

Traditional Muslim scholars argue that Islam is built on clear, unambiguous revelation directly from God. Previous revelation which has come through
various Prophets has been incomplete and often corrupted. Thus, as indicated above, the tradition of *tafsîr* which was built up in the first two centuries of Islam seems to have changed little since. Neither has it been much involved in theological questions for which there is no certain answer. Cragg is committed to new ways of interpreting the Qur’an which would be more in keeping with the reality of the pluralist world in which we live. Traditional interpretations do not allow for that. Cragg notes that presuppositions which are brought to a text influence the outcome.

With all Scriptures, exegesis proceeds upon what pre-suppositions it brings to them, even though its intention is to submit to them. Given the concepts implicit in the Qur’an’s doctrine of itself as God’s speech verbatim, the Islamic pre-suppositions understood the authority of the text — and their submission to it — in sharply literal terms. Grammar, syntax, parsing, became central duties. Though commentary did reflect theological controversies... it tended to take to itself a derivative status and to become authoritarian in its own right (*Readings in the Qur’an* 1988, 27).

Later we see a similar approach by Cragg to Christian Scriptures with regard to biblical criticism. He accepts and even praises the process but ignores the results, arguing that outcome is always based on pre-conceived ideas which are brought to the text (see 6.1.1).

Taking this a step further but on a related theme, Cragg notes that theodicy, the reverent questioning of God, is something which is not encouraged in traditional Islamic theology.

Quranic theism, with its dominant transcendental emphasis, discourages what we may call here the interrogation of God and of the idea of God. There is so instinctive a fundamentalism at its heart that it has little ready accommodation for the modern mood of agnosticism and revolt (*Mind of the Qur’an* 1973, 23).
Yet Cragg believes that this is a critical part of not just the interpretative but also the revelatory process. His recent book *The Lively Credentials of God* reckons on the 'credentials' of God as being ones which are challenged and questioned. Cragg argues that questioning can be brought to the Qur’ān which, practically speaking, would be at the expense of traditional Quranic interpretations. 'No text can have adequate readers, however reverent, if they are not also partners with it in an active apprehension (*Mind of the Qur’ān* 1973, 46).

Cragg comes to the text of the Qur’ān with different presuppositions from the traditionalists. It is out of these that he develops arguments for greater openness in interpretation, though he does it almost exclusively within the context of Islam and its Qur’ān. Earlier we gave an example of how Cragg argues his point through Quranic exegesis as well as through a different understanding of *ummi*, translation and context in the Qur’ān. Below are two more arguments.

### 2.5.2 Shi’i-Sunni interpretations

Cragg makes much of the fact that Shi’i (partisan) and Sunni (from Sunnah, 'customs') understanding of the Qur’ān has differed considerably over the years, particularly when it came to understanding the nature of the State in Islam. While the large majority Sunni branch developed a success tradition growing out of the Qur’ān, the minority (though still quite numerous) Shi’i 'fell back on a theology of suffering' (*Muhammad and the Christian* 1984, 143)
which was based on the Qur’an (Surah 33.33). We develop this theme more fully below when we discuss *shari’ah* below (see 2.7).

### 2.5.3 Modern Muslim Examples

Similarly, when realities challenge traditional understanding, interpretation *has* been found in the Qur’an, not outside it, to give it a new and proper Muslim perspective.

Thus, for example, ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq, in a now historic *tour d e force*, was able to argue from the Qur’an the non-necessity of the caliphate to Islam despite assumption of its indispensability through all the Muslim centuries. The Qur’an certainly survived the crisis of the end of the caliphate with surprising ease. Yet in retrospect it is not surprising at all, since the Qur’an in fact could not be proved to sustain it (*Mind of the Qur’an* 1973, 187).

Thus within Islam there are clear examples of new and accepted interpretations done in the light of the ‘modern’ realities of that time.

Finally, Cragg has identified respected Muslim scholars whose interpretations vary from traditional orthodox understanding. He uses this as yet another argument that there is considerable latitude for interpretation of the Qur’an, which can still be considered within the Muslim household of faith. Several of these scholars Cragg identifies in his *The Pen and the Faith*.

One whom he mentions more often than others is Kamil Husain, whose 1954 *Qaryah Zâlimah*

---

40 *The Pen and the Faith* deals with eight different Muslims, only one of which could be considered ‘traditional’ or ‘fundamentalist’, Sayyid Qutb of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In his introduction Cragg tries to deflect charges over his choice of people, recognising there would be those who would accuse him of not choosing a truly representative sample of modern Muslim thought.
(City of Wrong) Cragg translated in 1959. Husain’s approach to the Bible is an example for Cragg of what the Christian approach both can and should be toward the Qur’an.

Kamil Husain began by leaving open the vexed historical question between the Gospels and the Qur’an about whether Jesus was in fact crucified. He saw that, either way, there was a situation in which his crucifixion was intended . . . Husain also saw that a Jesus who had come, unflinching into such a climax of danger, without compromising his message, or eluding his mission and its risks, was a figure very like the one described in the four Gospels. Husain found himself very close to the Christian narratives within the parameters of the Quranic view (*Returning to Mount Hira*’ 1994, 114).

*Qaryah Zalimah* . . . demonstrated a careful, honest, perceptive relationship of faith to faith . . . [Kamil Husain] was able, and willing, to relate deeply Islamic themes to central elements in Christianity and he checked the abrupt assumptions of Christians about antipathy in the Qur’an (*Returning to Mount Hira*’1994, 115).

All of these are arguments Cragg uses for a freer, non-traditional interpretation of the Qur’an which he hopes a new generation of Muslims will bring about. Part of his role is to search them out and dialogue with them, to be one more catalyst toward a new period of Quranic interpretation.

### 2.6 Broader Scriptural Issues

Muslims do not acknowledge written traditions outside the Qur’an as Scripture. Yet when the Qur’an is compared with the Christians’ Bible the subject of Scripture in Islam becomes broader than just the Qur’an. In the Muslim theology of uncreated, celestial source of the Qur’an, the Qur’an is so far removed from mortal life that other written sources have developed in Islam to meet the need for application to the human situation. These are the
hadîth (tradition) and sunnah (customs), shari'ah (law) and ṣīrah (biography of the Prophet). They serve interpretative needs in Islam for which Christians, at least partially, use their Bible. Thus this chapter necessarily touches on aspects of written sources other than the Qur’ān, but not more than to the extent which Cragg himself deals with them.

In considering hadîth, sunnah, ṣīrah, and shari'ah, the chapter intentionally excludes tafsîr (traditional Quranic exegesis) as a scriptural source. It falls into another category of written material in that it is restricted to specific and often highly technical commentary on the Qur’ān. The others are types of contextual or situational responses to revelation. A very approximate comparison from the Christian point of view would be to include The Acts of the Apostles in the same category as a commentary on the Gospels.

2.6.1 Ḥadîth, Sunnah, and Ṣīrah

Although Cragg has not written a great deal on the subject of other written traditions in Islam, he does have a clear perspective on how they fit his particular theological understanding. Cragg notes that the English word ‘Tradition’ in fact covers two quite distinct Arabic terms, hadîth and sunnah (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 57). The hadîth are the reports of what was said and done by the Prophet Muhammad. The accuracy of hadîth are rated by their isnâd or chain of authoritative witnesses, going all the way back to the Prophet. The higher the quality of the isnâd, the more authoritative the hadîth. There are several collections of hadîth, some of which are considered to
be more reliable than others. The collection by Al-Bukhari (810-870) entitled Sahih, meaning ‘correct’, has been considered by many Muslims to be the most authoritative.41

The other Arabic term is sunnah, meaning the path, way or customs to be followed. Sunnah is drawn from the hadith and is considered to be used as instruction for living. Also arising from the hadith is the sirah or the biography of the Prophet,42 written by his devoted followers but based on hadith.

Cragg does not give much attention to the written traditions outside the Qur’an because he understands them from a particular perspective which attributes to them less importance than they have for most Muslims. He justifies this approach to Muslim Scriptures by arguing that ‘the Qur’an is always prior’ and Tradition is ‘complementary’ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 57). Muslims, however, study the hadith and develop from it the sunnah as a guide to how they should live. Cragg generally interprets this whole body of material as a drag on Islam, slowing down a new Quranic interpretation which is needed for today by their claims to authenticity but with their interpretations dogmatically set in the third century of Islam. Cragg notes that ‘the traditionalists quite failed to reckon with moving time’ (Event of the Qur’an 1971, 121).


42 The most famous is Ibn Ishaq (704-767), Sirah Rasul Allah.
On the positive side, the fact of the existence of hadith is an indication to Cragg that his understanding of the interactive nature of revelation is right. Hadith is the body of material which bears testimony to how the Prophet received and fulfilled revelation. The Qur'ān which, according to orthodox Muslim understanding, can never be understood to be biographical, lacks this necessary element of revelation. For the traditional Muslim the Qur'ān is transcendent, from God and timeless. It cannot be tied to context without denying the true nature of its revelation. Hadith, however, gives the necessary context. Thus hadith, according to Cragg, filled a gap (of situation or context) left by traditional Quranic interpretation, but in doing so it created an unnecessary dogma, which hindered, rather than helped, the development of Islam. Putting it in Cragg's words, 'The "incidentalism" of the days of the Qur'ān becomes... the "fundamentalism" of the centuries' (Event of the Qur'ān 1971, 121). This happened, according to Cragg, through the hadith. Thus the function of the hadith, for Cragg, is little more than to justify the fact that the Qur'ān is meant to be interpreted in a different way. 'There could be no clearer token that the Qur'ān is meant to be contextually understood than this vast wealth of Tradition' (Event of the Qur'ān 1971, 124). Because that hadith is hopelessly outdated, essentially it must be disregarded and new application found from the Qur'ān.

According to Cragg, two signs of hope that such a change is, in fact, coming about are, first, that the Qur'ān is now being translated quite extensively, putting the content of its message out to a wide range of possible interpreters. This has never happened before in the history of Islam. Secondly, the sīrah
which was popular in early years and has been almost a lost art for centuries, has recently been revived in a more current context. Several modern biographies of the Prophet have been written which move into new interpretative areas. Although Cragg has noted that ‘for the Christian the pattern of Muhammad’s šīrah will always be the conflict with the power and perspective of the Cross’ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984), there is reason to hope that the new šīrah, written from a modern context, will begin to present a different perspective.

It is worth noting that Cragg does not comment on neo-traditionalist interpretations of the Qur’ān mentioned earlier (see 2.1.3.2). They look for revival based on a new Quranic interpretation. That interpretation, however, is usually quite different from Cragg’s.

2.6.2 State and Shari‘ah

From hadith came sunnah and from sunnah (and the Qur’ān) came shari‘ah or law. Cragg struggles with the concept of law and state in Islam. He sees it as a move against the universal call of God.

Where Islam is potentially universalised in Hijrah it is inherently politicised in jihad. The move out of Mecca with the faith presages the move against Mecca for the faith. In that transition, not only is the Hijrah implemented in its prospective relevance, but Islam is defined in its essential character. In both transactions there is implicit the most fundamental question of all religion, namely the relation and the

---

relevance of power to truth (emphasis mine; Event of the Qur'an 1971, 134).

Cragg sees the 'military dimension' of Islam in its early years as being so sharply different from New Testament values (at least in the explanation of some interpreters of Islam) that it makes dialogue difficult (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 31). He is able to come to terms with this partly through his explanation of the Meccan situation at the time, thus putting into context these early military actions. He also calls on Christians to be self-aware enough to recognise problems of power in Christianity as well. His Returning to Mount Hira' is devoted entirely to the attempt to see how different early responses to the given revelation of the Qur'an might have produced a gentler Islam in history.

We have noted that Cragg is accused by his critics of ignoring important aspects of Islam in order to concentrate on those that fit his particular theological frame of reference. One such area is shari'ah. He has written virtually nothing on this important subject which dominates so much of Muslim thinking today. More than a simple distaste for the political side of Islam, Cragg objects theologically to the exclusivity which arises out of law and political systems. A classic example for Cragg are the contrasting Shi'i and Sunni understandings of government. Both claim to be based firmly on the Qur'an yet in practice produce very different theologies, not just different understandings of 'state'. Cragg has a particular affinity for the Shi'i approach because it has a theology of suffering. Suffering prophethood is a key component to Cragg's understanding of revelation (see 4.5.2.2).
Considering the political turmoil of Muslim governments which both historically and presently have tried to implement shari'ah, there seems to be substance to Cragg’s perspective. When one refers to shari'ah one has to ask which madhhab (school of law)? There are several different Sunni madhhab.

The hanbali law of the Arabian peninsula is considerably more conservative than the hanafi law which, in the Indian subcontinent, was inherited from the Mughuls and in the Middle East was a legacy of the Ottomans. There are also several Shi’i shari’ah, the largest of which, in Iran today, is the Ithna Ashârî, ‘Twelvers’, who believe there were twelve Imams, ‘rightly guided ones’. They are of the ‘Jafari’ school of law, named after the sixth Imam who is believed to have codified much of Shi’i law. There are also other smaller Shi’i groups, like the Agha Khanis, or other versions of the ‘Seveners’ (who believe in only seven Imams). Each has a different code of shari’ah. If shari’ah is introduced as the law of the land, immediately some who are Muslims are excluded because there is no universal shari’ah. A good example can be seen in Pakistan’s move toward an Islamic government. Proclamations introducing shari’ah invariably provoked reaction from Muslims marginalised by new laws, as was demonstrated by a classic document written shortly after the founding of the new nation.

Keeping in view the several definitions [of what is a Muslim] given by the ‘ulama need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine had done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given, say by any one of the ‘ulama, we remain Muslims according to the view of that ‘âlim but kâfirs according to the definition of everyone else.44

---

While Cragg does cover subject of *shari'ah* to some extent (*Call of the Minaret* 1956, Ch. 5 and *Counsels in Contemporary* 1965) he does not do so to the same degree as many other aspects of Islam, perhaps because he is so firmly convinced that structures of 'state' should not have a place in religion. Later we see how Cragg associates the ethnicity of the Old Testament with 'state' in Islam. Each is exclusive in a way it should not be, according to him (see 5.1.1, 5.1.4).

Cragg may be able to dismiss 'political Islam' in the *hadith, sunnah, sirah*, and *shari'ah*, but he faces a greater difficulty with the parts of the Qur'an which support this political aspect. While he can ignore the other above-mentioned written traditions, he cannot ignore the Qur'an. In order to possess the Qur'an as Scripture, the verses which support a political Islam (largely from the Medinan period) must be explained. In looking for a way to overcome the barrier of political Islam in the Qur'an, Cragg proposes that the earlier, non-political Surahs of the Meccan period of the Qur'an be seen as the norm which interprets the more political Medinan Surahs in a proper context.

*Islam should find a self-understanding in which its 'religious' quality is made central and definitive, a thing of the faithful as such and not what defines citizens as such or nationals. The ideal of government by God . . . cannot be realised by state control. . . . That would mean oppressive 'government by men'. God's regime, if at all, can only be by virtue of religious integrity informing secular democracy. Clearly the Qur'an's distinction between a 'religious' call in Mecca and a 'political' regime in Medina serves to undergird this pleading. The former can be seen as enduring, apolitical, time-transcending: the latter belonged only to that*

*Freedom Movement Revisited,' Al-Mushir 28 (1986), 14. This is more commonly referred to as the *Munir Report* after the Chairman of the Court of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Munir who headed the inquiry into the 1953 riots provoked by laws against the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan.*
time and place and has no enduring warrant in Islam (*Readings in the Qur'an* 1988, 71).

Thus Cragg is able to dismiss other written traditions, ignore the *shari'ah* and finally explain the Qur'ān. In so doing his interpretation of Scripture in Islam is quite distinctive.

Cragg interprets the non-Quranic traditions of Islam through a particular theological framework, where their substance is largely ignored but their existence is interpreted to bolster an approach to the Qur'ān which allows for greater freedom of interpretation, one which leads it closer to Christianity. This stands in contrast to the approach of McAuliffe, who takes seriously other written tradition in Islam, notably (in her case cited above) the traditional *tafsīr*, and uses that to interpret the Qur'ān. Cragg is not unaware of the wealth contained in other written traditions in Islam or even of the need to pay due respect. Yet he sees these traditions of interpretation as an all-too-human protective instinct to preserve the Qur'ān, which must be struggled against (*Mind of the Qur'ān* 1973, 55).

### 2.6.3 *Tahrīf*: an uncontested polemic

The Muslim doctrine of *tahrīf* (lit. corruption — the charge made by Muslims against Christians or Jews that they have changed their Scripture) is something Cragg touches on surprisingly little. Yet historically it has been a major block between Christians and Muslims. Even today Muslim apologists such as Ahmad Deedat of South Africa continue to develop a polemic against
Christians based on tahrif. We briefly analyse how Cragg’s theology is such that tahrif is not the problem for him that it traditionally has been for many other Christians.

Tahrif is ‘the charge made by Muslim theologians against the Christians, of having modified, and falsified, the Gospel to suppress predictions of the Prophet.’ Lazarus-Yafeh identifies it as the most basic of four Muslim arguments against the Bible. It is a form of polemics which is to be distinguished from apologetics in that the former is against the validity of another system, and the latter argues for the validity of one’s own system. While it has been a major issue in the past in debates between Christians and Muslims, it is perhaps less of an issue today though there are notable exceptions as in the case of Ahmad Deedat, whose approach is largely that of attacking Christian Scriptures. Three other general points about tahrif are worth making here. First, tahrif has been historically understood in two different senses: tahrif-i ma’nawi a change in meaning or interpretation, and tahrif-ilafзи, a change or corruption in the actual text. Secondly, the latter more serious usage of textual corruption has not made until more recently.
Thirdly, the charge of *tahrif* is used most frequently against Christianity and Judaism, even though traditional Muslim belief is that Prophets were sent to virtually all the peoples of the world at one time or another and surely some of them must have corrupted scriptures as well.

The word *tahrif* can hardly be found in any of Cragg’s writings. It is not in any of the several glossaries he has drawn up. Nor can it be found in the indices to any of his books. There are, however, two points relevant to our thesis which can be drawn from Cragg’s relative silence on the subject.

First, Cragg is aware of the issues and deals with the *tahrif* question, though never dignifying it as a doctrine in calling it by name. Cragg attributes, at least partly, the development of *tahrif* to Christian polemical attack on Islam.

[Muslim defence] relied in part upon corruption and affirmed that prophecies about Muhammad were lacking only because they had been suppressed. But some of them escaped suppression. The Old and New Testaments do contain foretellings of Muhammad. The corruption of these Scriptures is not total (*Call of the Minaret*, 1956, 284).

This does fit historically, in that *tahrif* did not develop as a doctrine against Christian Scriptures until relatively late in Islamic history. Cragg distances himself from polemics. Thus it is not surprising he does not take up arguments to defend Christian Scriptures against *tahrif* charges made by Muslims.

Secondly, it could be argued that Cragg is less concerned with the *tahrif* problem than Christians in the past have been because he sees an altogether different role for Christian Scriptures than was held up until the present century. For
Cragg the question is not one of comparing Scriptures, the Bible to the Qur‘an, but rather one of comparing revelations, Christ to Qur‘an. Christ is revelation for Christians. The New Testament tells about Christ. The Qur‘an does not tell about revelation, it is revelation for Muslims.

By contrast [to the derivative character of New Testament], the Qur‘an ... is not revelation by means of the description of a personality: it is revelation in mediation, as a book already existing eternally (Readings in the Qur‘an 1988, 18). Cragg’s theological method is to compare revelation to revelation, not Scripture to Scripture (see 4.5.1). Thus the necessity of defending the Bible is not the same felt need in Cragg’s theology as it has been for some Christians. However, we will later argue that Cragg runs into more than occasional interpretative difficulties because he addresses any scriptural question from a single model of valuing Scripture as only revelation (or as a contribution to revelation). His high view of Scripture which comes from Islam, can be seen to affect Cragg’s approach to his own Christian Scriptures. In addition to dulling his appreciation for scriptural issues in Islam other than the Qur‘an, it has had the effect of lessening his ability to see value in parts of Christian Scriptures which do not contribute to his understanding of revelation. This single model approach of revelation is certainly more applicable to the Qur‘an than to Christian Scriptures. But when Cragg applies this model and only this model to Christian Scriptures, he faces significant interpretative difficulties (see 4.5.3).

2.7 Sola Qur‘an

The Muslims’ ‘high’ view of their Qur‘an has been a problem for Christians down through the ages. A major motivation for Cragg’s later Quranic study
was to address this problem in a more constructive and compassionate way. \(^5\)

There is a clearly discernible change in Cragg’s approach to the Qur’ān over the course of his forty years of writing. Early understanding focused more on traditional problems Christians might have with the Qur’ān. For example

If one sought a single justification for the Christian mission to Islam one might well be content to find it in the Quranic picture of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Consider the Quranic Jesus alongside the New Testament. How sadly attenuated is this Christian prophet as Islam knows him! (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 261).

‘. . . must not the emasculated Jesus of the Qur’ān be rescued from misconception and disclosed in all his relevance. . . . To do this is what is meant here by retrieval (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 262).

Nevertheless even in this, his earliest of publications, seed thoughts for later articulation are discernible where an increasingly deeper appreciation of the Qur’ān emphasises the common ground much more than the differences.

The Qur’ān recognises in measure the sort of divine relationship to humanity that underlies the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Book itself is God’s speech. God sends messengers and spirits, to whom the divine counsel has been spoken. There are intermediaries between God and the world of time and sense. Clearly these communicative activities of God are differentiated from creative activities. We have at least to think of God in different capacities. The basic contrast here is that Christianity takes these activities and gathers them into its understanding of God Himself. . . ’ (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 262).

Later (Ch. 4-8) we see how an increasingly positive view of the Qur’ān as Scripture is possible for Cragg as his approach to Christian Scriptures develops and changes as a result of his engagement with Islam. A more defined place for the Qur’ān was clearly articulated in his post-retirement writing (see 2.2.3.2), though nuances of this position were also present earlier.

---

\(^5\) See, for example, Event of the Qur’ān 1971, 64 where Cragg deals with the question of Naskh as the ‘Quranic supercession of the Christian Scriptures.’
Martin Luther broke with the traditions and control of the medieval church, not because he wanted that in itself but rather because he wanted to reconcile the traditions of the church with the Bible but keep the Bible supreme. The Latin expression *Sola Scriptura*, ‘only Scripture’ is arguably the best known of his five ‘solas’. Breaking with the Church in his time, Luther argued that final authority was not to be housed in the church but rather in Scripture. Translation and availability of Christian Scriptures was one result of the theological development of that time. So too Cragg seeks to drop traditional interpretations of the Qur’ān controlled by Muslim commentators but still cling to that Qur’ān. In Islam as in Protestantism there is no official priesthood, but in both practice is different from theory. There continues to be almost complete interpretative control over the Qur’ān which Cragg, in his interpretation, fights against.

The margins of the Qur’ān are so copiously filled with interpreters and their erudition that the book itself has been taken into a sort of protective custody and needs saving from the very custodians (*Mind of the Qur’ān* 1973, 55).

There is a role for those outside the household of Muslim faith to help in this process, provided they can do it with due respect and integrity. This Cragg tries to do. Cragg has not been deterred by his small audience in both Christian and Muslim circles. Traditions die hard, but a few can be catalysts for greater, more universal change.

As we have already noted, there is some evidence that new Quranic interpretation is happening. First, it is now reasonably well accepted that the
Qur'ān can be translated, an act which in and of itself is interpretation and which opens the door for wide and varied interpretations. Secondly, there are already those within the Muslim community who have this freer non-traditional approach which Cragg seeks (2.7.3 above). Others besides Cragg see hope in these developments. Norman Daniel writes about Kamil Husain's *Qaryah Zālimah* (City of Wrong).

Yet this account, which denies a central article of the Christian faith, is deeply and strangely sympathetic to the Christian idea. Its author was not in the mainstream of current Muslim thinking, but he seems to point out a way where the two religions can meet, even where they most profoundly disagree, and if ecumenicism has a future at all, that is the way it may well lie.\(^5\)

Despite these hopeful signs, according to Cragg, the Qur'ān remains a Scripture, fully possessed by Muslims, but still waiting to be interpreted. That interpretation can only happen by dropping the accretions of the centuries which are the current method by which Muslims possess the Qur'ān. New interpretation, such as Husain's, Cragg believes, will be part of what brings Islam and Christianity closer together.

The one constant, though often underlying and thus unspoken question Cragg's critics have for him is just how discontinuous can a new interpretation be? New religions, like the Sikhs (India) and the Baha'is (Iran), have begun and flourished in an attempt to do away altogether with divergent religious dogmas. Others have died out, finding no base, such as Akbar the Great's (sixteenth century) attempt to begin 'Din-i-Ilahi' (Divine Faith) in the Indian

---

subcontinent. All recognised problems in dogma and sought to solve the problem through discontinuity with existing faiths.

Is Cragg’s interpretation of the Qur’ān (and the Bible) so different that it runs the danger of being a new type of faith? We believe not. Although Cragg has been critiqued for only considering the Qur’ān and not other aspects of the Muslim faith or of bringing a ‘Christian’ interpretation to the Qur’ān which goes against Muslim interpretation, his approach is one which sees continuity, not discontinuity, of an existing faith, Islam, with Christianity. Cragg, a sincere Christian who is equally respectful of Islam, is committed to ‘fidelity’ to one’s faith when engaging in theology in cross-reference. The above chapter has touched on how Christian elements are present in his Quranic interpretation. This thesis considers below one aspect of the Christian faith, Christian Scriptures, to see what new interpretations Cragg brings as he tries to do in Christianity what Kamil Husain has done, in at least one instance, i.e., be faithful to his own religion, yet bring it closer to the other faith through a different, non-traditional, understanding.
3. Cragg’s Approach to Scriptures in Perspective

People belong to their times. Even those who have made the most remarkable contributions in human history in retrospect can be seen to have had horizons limited by the perspectives of location and time. Yet their legacy lives on through permutations and changes. That legacy is better understood when their contribution is compared to others engaging in similar endeavours in comparable time and place.

There is no shortage of Christians who have engaged with Islam over the centuries and whose works are currently available to us. To name just a few: John of Damascus (675-753), *De Haeresibus*; the Catholicos Timothy I (728-823) and his dialogue from meeting with Caliph al-Mahdi; Al-Kindi (Ca 820) and his correspondence with Al-Hashami; Paul of Antioch (Ca 1180), ‘Letter to Muslim Friends’; Raymond Lull (1235-1315), ‘Liber del Gentil e los tres savis’ and ‘Disputatio Raymundi Christiani et Hamar Saraceni’; Theodor Buchman (1504-1564) and his three volumes on Islam; Ludovico Marracci (1612-1700), ‘Prodromus ad Refutationem Alcorani’; Karl Pfander (1803-1865), *Balance of Truth*; William Muir (1819-1905), ‘The Testimony borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.’ But this thesis focuses on another type of comparison with Kenneth Cragg.

---

Every introduction to Cragg puts him in some kind of context. More thorough studies on his life have tried to isolate those influences which later became significant. The purpose of this chapter is not to assess influences but rather to assess how others, in positions like Cragg who were trying to do similar things, responded in the context of their times. We compare 'like with like' in order to highlight both the continuity as well as the distinctives of Cragg’s contribution to the area of our study, Christian Scriptures. Thus this chapter places Cragg in the context of three comparable scholars of similar backgrounds, all of whom have either engaged with Islam or have had significant, life-long contact with Muslims. Two are historical, of the generation immediately preceding Cragg, and one is modern, still alive and working at the time of writing. We also briefly introduce two others (modern) whose writings we reference to highlight two important aspects which are missing in Cragg’s approach to Christian Scriptures. Both have had extensive contacts with the Muslim world but neither directly engages with Islam in the way that Cragg and the other three have.

3.1 Historical: Zwemer and Gairdner

Samuel Marinus Zwemer (1867-1952) and William Henry Temple Gairdner (1873-1928) were both Christian missionaries in the Muslim world of the generation just prior to Kenneth Cragg. The motivation for mission for both grew out of the student Christian movements of their respective countries, USA and UK, which had strong ties into the evangelical modern mission interest. Both Zwemer and Gairdner maintained firm loyalty to their
respective denominations. Kenneth Cragg, too, was strongly influenced in his younger days by the successor to the same movement in Oxford (Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union — OICCU) and has remained a committed Anglican for his entire life.

Zwemer, American Dutch, is considered by many to be the best of the reformed tradition in missions of his time. ‘Never in the history of the church has any Christian covered the Moslem world so comprehensively, in study, travel, planning and advocacy of mission to it.’

Gairdner, on the other hand, is a highly respected representative of the Anglican communion.

The best of evangelical Anglican concern for the Muslim world came to reside in the person of Temple Gairdner. In him, one finds reflected the personal compassion of Henry Martyn; the apologetics flowing from Pfander to Lefroy, the concern for the indigenous church evidenced by French and Clark; the scholarly literary labours of Tisdall; and more.

Though both had personal and leadership qualities which made them highly respected by those who knew them, each also produced extensive amounts of written materials which are available for study today. Scholarly interest in Islam, excellent grasp of Arabic, deeply committed Christian (Protestant) motivation coupled with an articulation into writing are all qualities shared by Zwemer, Gairdner and, a half-century later, Cragg.

---

There were also direct links from both Zwemer and Gairdner to Cragg. Zwemer began and continued as editor of the well respected journal *The Muslim World* (originally *The Moslem World*) for 36 years, up through 1947. Cragg was co-editor of the same publication for some eight years during and after his time in Hartford (1952-1960). Gairdner’s ecclesiastical Anglican identity coupled with his Cairo link through CMS provides an equally strong point of continuity with Cragg; one that is based in the Middle East. Given similar backgrounds, motivations and tasks, had Cragg lived some fifty years earlier, there are ways in which he could have been either a Samuel Zwemer or a Temple Gairdner.

Those who have studied Zwemer and Gairdner in depth have noted that they both changed in their approach to Islam over the course of their writing careers. Vander Werff argues that these changes reflect a shift from looking back in order to answer questions about mission arising from the nineteenth century to a looking forward in anticipation of questions which would become common in the twentieth century.

It was soon apparent that nineteenth century traditional theology and ecclesiastical practice would not satisfy the questions of the twentieth century situation. . . . Evangelicals who had been content to share in the spirit and activity of evangelization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, now faced the unavoidable task of restating the truths of Christianity. . . . This would be in short, a reformulation of the evangelical theology of mission, a reshaping which began at about the turn of the century and reached a climax in the crisis in theology and mission at Tambaram, 1938.

---

These changes are small, however, compared to *The Call of the Minaret* by Cragg, which marked the beginning of a more dramatic shift not just in tone but in substance as well. Generally speaking this change is characterised by a more sympathetic understanding of Islam. Similar backgrounds, motivations and tasks among Zwemer, Gairdner and Cragg, separated by a half-century in time, produced diverging perspectives.

From our perspective at the end of the twentieth century, both Zwemer and Gairdner wrote surprisingly little about Christian Scriptures. There was an assumption by both regarding the nature of Christian Scriptures which was fully accepting and unchallenged in each of their theologies, despite the questions New Testament scholarship of that period was raising. There were, however, one or two significant exceptions to this. Towards the end of his career when he had left the Middle East and was living in the United States Zwemer wrote a chapter entitled 'The Battle of the Books', referring to the Bible and the Qur'ān.6 Gairdner, on the other hand, made some of the earliest reflections on differing views of inspiration between Christianity and Islam.7 Both Zwemer and Gairdner were also aware of issues of biblical criticism. Gairdner even called for the critical method to be used with Islam.8 Nevertheless, neither of them significantly addressed the developing

---

7 Padwick, *Temple Gairdner*, 327, 328, lists two pamphlets by Gairdner on the subject of inspiration in her bibliography. 'Inspiration, A Dialogue.' (A comparison of Muslim and Christian ideas), India: Christian Literature Society, 1909 and in Arabic 'Inspiration, Christian and Islamic,' Cairo: CMS, 1913. About the latter Padwick writes that it was 'the most important essay yet published on the subject.'
theological crisis for those who held to a high view of Christian Scriptures (as they themselves did).

Although his early writing generally avoided questions about the nature of Christian Scriptures Cragg did, however, address scriptural questions first in his writings about the Qur'an and eventually, more candidly, on the Bible in his later writings. Because our topic is Christian Scriptures, the modern comparisons to Cragg which we choose are people who have dealt directly with the issue of Christian Scriptures in the Islamic context.

3.2 Modern: Wilfred Cantwell Smith

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (b. 1916) has written extensively about Islam. He has also squarely tackled questions about the nature of scripture. As a university student Smith was active in the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. Largely because of the influence of SVM he went to Lahore, (now Pakistan but then India) under the Canadian Overseas Mission Council in 1941 for four years to teach history at Forman Christian College (Presbyterian). After a Master's degree (1947) and a Ph. D. (1949) from Princeton, Smith founded (1951) and for fifteen years headed McGill University's Graduate Institute of Islamic Studies in Canada. One stated purpose of this institute was to have an equal number of Christian and Muslim faculty. Thus, like Cragg, he has missionary experience, contact with and scholarly interest in Islam. Smith also developed a clear theological perspective in his approach to Islam.

9 See for example, Smith, *What is Scripture?* 1993.
and throughout his life has maintained his Presbyterian church ties. His writings have been the subject of several serious studies, some of which compare him to Cragg.\textsuperscript{10} Added to this there has been significant interaction between the two over the years. Although Smith’s area of academics now is primarily that of an historian of religions, his early experience with and consequently his writing on Islam is greater than that relative to any other religion except Christianity.

We briefly make two other modern comparisons. Kenneth Bailey (b. 1930) is known for his books, lectures, tapes and videotapes in which he primarily engages in historical exegesis of the New Testament. He has achieved recognition in the area of New Testament studies. Up until his retirement in 1995 Bailey spent his working life in the Middle East under the Presbyterian Church where he continued to pursue New Testament scholarship. His approach to historical exegesis and the parables of Jesus is of particular significance to this thesis.

Finally we also introduce Lamin Sanneh, Gambian Muslim turned Christian who is now the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity as well as Professor of History at Yale College. His seminal book puts forward a

thesis about the nature of Christian Scriptures as revelation.\textsuperscript{11} It provides significant contrast to Cragg’s view about revelation in Christian Scriptures.

### 3.3 Temple Gairdner and Kenneth Cragg

The first area of comparison is the suppositional base for ministry which each developed out of early call. Gairdner’s ‘call’ to the mission field grew out of his enthusiastic participation in the OICCU. During Gairdner’s time it was marked by a zealous commitment to prayer, evangelism and a simple lifestyle where the group avoided personal expenditure wherever possible with every penny saved being given to missions. So much was his commitment to this cause that he received only a disappointing Second in ‘Greats’ as the official recognition for his time of study at Oxford. Yet throughout his life he remained positive about his involvement in the OICCU, recognising that zeal provides a motivation which can later be tempered by wisdom. Years later in a letter to his own son, he summarised his perspective.

> Everything will be black or white with them; no shading of any sort. And their vocabulary will be to match. BUT, I say again, these people have to be reckoned with. Was not I in the midst of them, and one of them at Oxford? And as I look round the world I see everywhere that it is these men (perhaps mellowed and developed now) who are doing the big things in the world — the big things for mankind, and God, and the Kingdom of Christ.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12} Emphasis the author’s. Padwick, Temple Gairdner, 20-21 quoting from one of Gairdner’s letters.
With Gairdner this zeal was tempered by a wisdom which came with age and interaction particularly with those from the household of Islam. Yet despite these changes the primary focus of this zeal was never lost in his lifetime.

For Gairdner the content of the Gospel is Christ and evangelism the communication of him. ... During his whole ministry, Gairdner held that it was only in Jesus Christ that man can enter into a right relationship with God and experience the full life for which he was created. ... While agreeing that Jesus set forth a personal and social morality which has never been surpassed, Gairdner will not stop there. 13

Thus the intent that Muslims should become Christians was Gairdner’s driving motivation until his death. There were significant changes in his approach to and appreciation of Islam, but the fundamental motivation remained constant. ‘This stake-peg of all his mission meant that all “debate” or “dialogue” was with intent to save, not crudely to score, nor idly to compare, nor cosily to converse’ (‘Temple Gairdner’s Legacy’ 1981, 165).

Thirty-five years later Cragg was an active participant in the same movement in Oxford, including being the representative of his college and engaging in public evangelism (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 40). Yet Cragg’s motivation in ministry changed to be somewhat different from that of his college years and that of Gairdner.

If there is legitimate point in the distinction between Christian mission to Muslims intending their conversion, and a Christian mission to Islam intending a relevance to its mind and society, it was a distinction hardly operative in Christian awareness in Gairdner’s generation (‘Temple Gairdner’s Legacy’ 1981, 166).

Below we highlight significant differences between Cragg and Gairdner which can be traced back to this different perspective, beginning with where each put their time and effort.

Gairdner often poured his time into mundane tasks which he believed in the end would contribute significantly towards producing converts from Islam. Much toil went into the small community of converts which came from the discussions with Muslims which first he and D. M. Thornton (a respected senior colleague) and then he alone had (after Thornton died). Constance Padwick described his dashed hopes at attempts to produce significant scholarly works on Islam, something men such as Duncan Macdonald and Ignaz Goldziher had been encouraging him to do. All he had to give... was lavished unsparingly upon the Egyptian church, its present and its future, its hymnology, its drama, the tutoring of the expatriates who all too thinly came to serve it, its nurture in theology, and its outreach in witness ('Temple Gairdner's Legacy' 1981, 165).

Cragg gave more time to scholarly pursuits and so produced more written material. It is also worth noting that Gairdner died relatively young (fifty-five) while much of Cragg's more significant writing has come in the twenty years which have so far passed since he turned sixty-five. Cragg's mission was to the mind of Islam, attempting to show the relevance of the Christian faith to the Muslim way of thinking. Gairdner's ministry was to Muslims, seeking their conversion, and his time was taken up with people. Still Gairdner was a brilliant Arabist who had learned much about Islam in his engagements with Muslims in what he considered to be the missiologically strategic city of Cairo.

---

3.3.1 A move away from confrontation

Padwick, Cragg and Vander Werff, all of whom in one way or another have written as historians on Gairdner's life, each articulate what they consider to be a significant change in Gairdner regarding his approach to Islam. It can be summarised as a shift from polemics to apologetics, which meant, if not a more positive view of things Islamic, at least an approach which was less confrontational. This was a change of which Gairdner himself was conscious.

In his early work with Thornton they 'discovered' the strategy of literature distribution as a means of preparation and evangelisation. Tracts had become passé in Britain but they were enthusiastically taken up in Cairo. Realising the strategic value of literature, Gairdner and Thornton did a survey of the then available Christian material that engaged with Islam. They found it surprisingly inadequate in content and confrontational in tone. They observed that converts who came by that route were often themselves antagonistic and argumentative in their new Christian faith. Thus Gairdner moved away from an attack on Islam to a focus on explaining to Muslims problems they faced with various Christian beliefs. Vander Werff notes, 'From 1912 onwards, Gairdner's appreciative if critical research in Islam is paralleled by a more positive presentation of Christ.' 'His new irenic approach reflects a fresh awareness of Muslim attitudes and strives to communicate Christ without offending.'

Of this change in Gairdner Cragg writes, 'There is a discernible

---

15 Many of these 'tracts' had limited circulation in the Middle East. They did not find their way into books which would make their ideas available in libraries around the world. Two sources for fairly complete lists of what Gairdner wrote in these areas are in Vander Werff, Christian Mission to Muslims, 279-282; and Padwick, Temple Gairdner, 327-330. Many of his writings can be accessed at the Partnership House Library of CMS in Waterloo, London.
17 ibid., 205.
mellowing of his writing within the second decade of the century as he came to closer grips with the travail of his vocation' (Temple Gairdner's Legacy' 1981, 165).

This change can be traced to Gairdner's sabbatical year of travel and study, *wanderjahr* (1910-11). During that year he had engaged in serious research in Islam and though on return he did not have time for much more, he did accomplish a translation of Al-Ghazali's Sufi mystic work *Mishkât al-Anwâr* (The Niche for Lights). Other writing also demonstrated the change where he now took Islam seriously and sought to discover what was valid in it. Vander Werff went so far as to assess that Gairdner 'acknowledges that Islam may be to the Arabs as Judaism was to the Hebrews, a preparatio evangelica.'

Gairdner may have been moving in that direction but we did not find evidence in his writings that he actually arrived at that conclusion.

There is some controversy over Gairdner's last piece of writing, a report which was co-authored with Dr W. A. Eddy for the 1928 International Missionary Council meeting in Jerusalem. In it he wrote of 'values' in Islam. Vander Werff noted that some believed this was a more radical re-understanding of Islam. Nevertheless, although his language could be misleading, Gairdner himself clarified that by 'values' he did not mean 'truths'. Part Two of the Article, published in *The Muslim World*, clarified his Christian position.

---


It is not part of our present task to evaluate the essentials of Christianity, but only to emphasise afresh those features of the Christian message and experience which are of first importance in the conflict with Islam.\(^{20}\)

Thus to the end Gairdner was convinced that 'Christian mission had decisive "quarrel" with Islam, which irenic sensitivity must refine but could in no way loyally evade' ('Temple Gairdner's Legacy' 1981, 166).

This 'quarrel' stands in contrast to Cragg's position. Cragg believes that 'a still more authentic relation to Islam . . . [refuses] to concede that Islam is impervious on its own terms to the theological relevance of the cross' (emphasis original; *ibid.*). There are points, some of which we see carry over from Gairdner's work, where Cragg finds aspects of Islam which are incompatible. His approach, however, is not simply to accept the differences. Rather Cragg, operating from the premise that the cross is relevant to Islam on Islam's own terms, stretches the boundaries of traditional understanding through reinterpretation of not only the Qur'ān but of Christian Scriptures as well.

### 3.3.2 Brotherhood in Islam and Christianity

Gairdner built a central theological premise on the parable of the Good Samaritan but perceived a general Christian shortcoming with respect to it. 'That unique charter of universal tenderness and serviceableness which Jesus gave in this parable has not been fully appreciated even by the followers of Christ.'\(^{21}\) Christianity claims a brotherhood to the whole world but in some ways Muslims have done more with their limited sense of brotherhood. This

---

was a challenge for Christians. Padwick quoted from a meeting at which Gairdner spoke in Glasgow later in his life.

"The brotherhood which Christ brought to earth is infinite and unlimited, but Christians have limited and particularized it. The brotherhood of Islam is finite and limited, but such as it is Mohammedans have universalized it. Not until the perfect thing is once more available and offered to Mohammedans can Islam's imperfect thing pass away."  

"Or, in other words of Gairdner's, 'The Christian fraternity, so magnificently realised in the first centuries, is today broken to bits, but the ideal is still the only hope for humanity.' This theme Gairdner used to press for better inter-church relations. It was also part of the driving ideology which led to the founding of a fully integrated church in Cairo.

In Cragg a similar idea to Gairdner's 'brotherhood' found expression in his interpretation of Christian Scriptures. This is evident in two ways. The first is the concept of the 'hospitality' of the gospel (see Ch. 7). The second is his early articulation of 'retrieval', rescuing the gospel from accretions and misunderstandings which have surrounded it (see 7.1.1).

3.3.3 Revelation

Gairdner was critical of what he understood to be the Muslim concept of revelation.

"With Moslems the Infinite comes to mean only the negation of the Finite. ... Islam is philosophically agnostic, and Revelation is only a formal and mechanical link between incompatibles."  

\[\text{\cite{padwick2001}, p. 349.}\]

\[\text{\cite{padwick2001}, p. 276.}\]

\[\text{\cite{gairdner1955}, p. 349.}\]

\[\text{\cite{padwick2001}, p. 342.}\]
Gairdner was struggling with differing concepts of revelation in Christianity and Islam. His unequivocal judgment is one Cragg abandoned in favour of a more conciliatory approach. Cragg too believes that the Muslim orthodox understanding of the Qur'ān and revelation is a mechanical model. He argues, however, that this understanding does not necessarily come from the Qur'ān itself but rather from misled interpreters ('How Not Islam?' 1977, 390). Thus he developed his own definition and understanding of revelation (see 4.5).

Engagement with Islam brought Gairdner to consider issues of revelation in Christianity. Although he did not articulate the theological implications, he more than hinted in his writings that the Qur'ān must be compared to Christ and not the Bible.

these Gospels were simply the committal to writing of the Acts and Words of Christ, as they had been taught and preached from the very outset. . . . Thus Islam conducts us to a Book which truly was given forth by its founder. Christianity conducts us to a Christ who truly lived, wrought, died, rose again on the third day and passed alive into the unseen. 25

The juxtaposition of the last two sentences above shows the seeds of comparison which Cragg later picked up. As we see later, comparing Christ to the Qur'ān is intrinsic to Cragg's understanding of both revelation and scripture (see 4.5). Gairdner and Cragg interpret the Muslim understanding of revelation similarly. Both move towards a position of comparing revelation to revelation rather than scripture to scripture, which results in a comparison of Christ, as written in Scriptures, to the Qur'ān. However from there they solve the problem differently. Cragg, seeking common ground, argues that a mechanical revelation is not a true Quranic understanding and develops his

own definition of revelation (see 4.5). Gairdner sees the difference as part of an irreducible quarrel with Islam. This in turn leads to a different handling of not just the Qur'an but also the Old Testament (see 5.2).

3.3.4 Old Testament — New Testament discontinuity

Like Cragg, Gairdner noted areas of discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Although he made little attempt to study the issue in depth, he does give an indication of his theological understanding of the problem.

If some such idea may possibly be conceded for the Old Testament dispensation, the heart and substance of the New Testament dispensation is the revelation of God's essential nature, through the Incarnation, and through the effusion of the Holy Spirit, and so in the Holy Trinity.26

The above quote is an indication that Gairdner handled the problem of discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments through a theology of dispensations, or progressive revelation.27 Over the course of his writing Cragg's approach moves towards a stronger element of rejection of the Old Testament. Part of this is evident when he does not distinguish between natural and special revelation, making it possible for him essentially to see the Qur'an and the Old Testament in much the same light as different types of preparation for receiving the gospel (see 5.3). Thus for Cragg 'unique' is not a word that can be used for any faith, even Christianity, for it has an exclusiveness, even a hostility, about it, as that which is totally 'other' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 323). This is not a position Gairdner would have been able to support. Vander Werff notes

Although not opposed to the idea of general revelation (hence one can be cognisant of something of worth in other religions), he was under no

---

26 Ibid., 342.
illusion as to the distinctiveness, the uniqueness of God's work and word in his Messiah.²⁸

Space does not permit further study of Gairdner's views on general (natural) revelation but a critique of Cragg's position is taken up in 4.5.2.

3.3.5 Scriptural Criticism and the Hadîth

Gairdner, aware of issues of biblical criticism, pressed for Muslims themselves to use historical criticism, not necessarily on the Qur'ân itself, but at least on the hadîth. This did not indicate an acceptance of the Qur'ân, but rather an indirect way of critiquing it. In contrast to this implication for Muslim scriptures, Gairdner saw the criticism of people such as Adolf Harnack as only providing further proof of the Gospels' reliability. His purpose in calling for this criticism of hadîth was not to produce a reformed Islam (an approach with which people have charged Cragg) but rather 'to help Muslims see their real dilemma and to become receptive to God's news in Christ'.²⁹ According to Gairdner, much in Islam, even down to shari'ah, the law itself, was historically incorrect.

The whole orthodox system of Koran exegesis and the whole orthodox system of canon-law rest (as system) upon the traditions even more than on the Koran itself. If the unreliability of these, then, is established, those systems ought logically to be doubted and discarded.³⁰

Although Cragg had a similar approach to the hadîth and other scriptural traditions in Islam, he possibly took them even less seriously, being merely dismissive of them and not taking the effort to critique. His approach differed from Gairdner in that for Cragg these (unreliable) traditions were powerful

²⁸ Vander Werff, Christian Mission to Muslims, 201.
²⁹ Ibid., 212.
evidence that the Qur’ān needed to be interpreted situationally, something which is not part of orthodox interpretation. Their existence for Cragg was proof of the need for a new, innovative interpretation of the Qur’ān. Though both reject the hadith, Gairdner used it as an indirect attack on the Qur’ān and the whole Islamic system. Cragg uses it as an argument for reinterpreting the Qur’ān (see 2.6.1).

3.3.6 Translation and Koine Greek

Gairdner was able to complete a translation and commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians in 1927, although time for more scholarship did not materialise in the way that he had hoped. Galatians, with its emphasis on the new place for the law in the Christian faith, has traditionally been used by missionaries in the Muslim world to introduce the basics of Christianity to new converts. Padwick wrote that this work was

An essay at a fresh Arabic translation of the Epistle, nearer the spirit and the idiom of the Koine Greek. By this slender book he inaugurated a new Biblical literature in Arabic, for this was the first serious commentary written with the needs in view of a Church whose main witness must be to the surrounding Moslem world.31

Gairdner did translation work on the Bible, Cragg on the Qur’ān, although he has also noted the need for Arabic Bible translation work (Arab Christian 1991, 282-5). Padwick praised Gairdner’s efforts as a more realistic rendering of Koine Greek. Cragg’s inclinations in Bible translation are more toward high literary style, similar to Quranic Arabic, and toward one translation which can be accepted by all the churches as the Bible (see 4.4). Cragg and Gairdner seem

31 Padwick, Temple Gairdner, 308.
likely to have had different ideas about what constituted a ‘good’ translation of the Bible. Further evidence of this is Gairdner’s forays into the area of drama as opposed to Cragg’s emphasis on literary style and poetry.

3.3.7 Drama

One of the most distinctive legacies Gairdner left was the work he did in drama. Bringing together his skills as a poet, musician and theologian, he wrote and produced several biblical dramas which were well received.32 His mission society felt that this was a poor use of time and an inappropriate method for communicating the gospel message. He was asked to desist and so any dramas he performed after these early ones were less ambitious and were not performed on church property.

It is significant that Gairdner’s first drama, *Joseph and his Brothers*, was not only from the Old Testament but emphasised the Jews as a covenant people. It is probable that the Egyptian connection in the Joseph story was one reason for this choice. Cragg interpreted the idea of a chosen people by God as a type of exclusive ‘ethnicity’. Gairdner did not have the same intellectual struggle as Cragg with the particular or prototype covenant (Old Testament) which later was made universal for all humankind (New Testament). There was, of course, no Jewish state during Gairdner’s time. The Arab-Israeli issue loomed much larger in Cragg’s personal experience. That is undoubtedly part of the reason for this difference.

---

32 For instance, *Joseph and his Brothers*, 1921; *Passover Night*, 1921; *The Last Passover Night*, 1922; *Saul and Stephen, A Sacred Drama*, 1922; *The Good Samaritan*, 1923.
It is interesting to note that Bailey utilised this drama style early on in his career. Although Cragg himself is something of a poet and has expressed appreciation for Gairdner's dramatic contributions, the medium of scriptural drama is not something his theological approach produces. His approach is not to seek or pass on scriptural 'truth', per se. It is the crucified Christ, as recorded in Scriptures, who is to be contemplated and understood. Secondly, the popularising form of a drama in relation to Scripture is an unlikely form of approach for Cragg. He is predisposed towards a higher literary form, not a popularising.

3.3.8 The Gospel of Barnabas

Some Muslims active in the *tahrif* debate have utilised the existence of the Gospel of Barnabas as 'proof' that Christians have changed their Scripture. The Gospel of Barnabas, now almost universally recognised by scholarship as a medieval forgery, fits well with Islam, being 'designed to exalt the religion of Islam, and an Islamic flavour pervades the whole.' Almost as soon as it was 'discovered' and translated into Arabic, Gairdner and an Egyptian colleague wrote a refutation (1907). This refutation has been used as the basis for many other critiques of the Gospel of Barnabas. With very little other comment, it has also been republished in modern times as response to Muslims' continuing use of this spurious 'gospel' as a polemical tool.

We have already noted that Cragg, ignoring the area of polemics, does not answer Muslims in the arena of the *tahrif* question. Although Gairdner's work

---

on the Gospel of Barnabas was early in his career, when he was more inclined
to be polemical, it can still be argued that any questions of Christian scriptural
integrity were more important for his theology than they generally are for
Cragg.

3.3.9 Summary

Vander Werff summarised Gairdner's Christian answer to Islam as 'an
apologetic approach that becomes sympathetic to Muslims without
compromising evangelical convictions.' Comparing and contrasting
Gairdner's and Cragg's general stance vis à vis Islam has been useful to enable
understanding of their approach to scriptures. However, the interest of this
section for our thesis is the degree to which Gairdner addresses scriptural
issues in Christianity and Islam. For Gairdner there remained an uncritical
acceptance of the Bible as Scripture and, to some degree, as revelation, though
there is evidence of a comparison of Christ to the Qur'ān rather than the Bible
to the Qur'ān.

On the other hand, there is no evidence, despite his softening stance towards
Islam over the years, that Gairdner ever accepted the Qur'ān in quite the same
way as Cragg does. For Gairdner the Qur'ān remained part of a non-Christian
system which could only be construed as diabolical. It could be argued that
for Cragg 'the religious phenomena of Christianity are universal religious

---


Ibid., 346, n. 111. These are Vander Werff's words to describe one of several basic
philosophical stances towards Islam.
phenomena on the highest level of their development.\textsuperscript{37} There is no evidence that Gairdner would go so far. Gairdner did, however, come to the belief that Islam could provide partial answers to the questions of the universe. These, presumably, can be found in the Qur'an. Thus we see that similar backgrounds and similar motivations, set in different times, at least in this case produce divergent responses to scriptural questions in Christianity and Islam.

3.4 Samuel Zwemer and Kenneth Cragg

Zwemer was born three years before Gairdner but lived much longer, making a contribution as an academic in the USA for the latter part of his life. Thus Zwemer had many more formal publications than did Gairdner.\textsuperscript{38} Zwemer and Gairdner maintained a personal friendship where they exchanged ideas, shared platforms in major inter-church events and even worked together at a study centre in Cairo for a period of time. Cragg notes, however, that there was a difference in approach to Islam between the two.

It would not be wise to ascribe Zwemer's more trenchant views of Islam to Gairdner. For all their deep friendship, they were men of different personal and theological mettle ("Temple Gairdner's Legacy" 1981, 165).

That difference might best be described as polemics (attacking Islam) versus apologetics (explaining Christianity). However, Zwemer, like Gairdner, moved

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 219.

\textsuperscript{38} Wilson, Apostle to Islam, 251-253 lists thirty-six published books and twelve more in joint authorship. Vander Werff, Christian Mission to Muslims, 291-295 lists the same books but also includes tracts, Arabic books, Zwemer's numerous contributions to The Muslim World, as well as his contributions to articles in other books. Vander Werff's seems to be a fairly complete bibliography of published material by Zwemer.
towards a more conciliatory approach toward Islam during the course of his life.

3.4.1 General approach to Islam

A lively inquiring mind took Zwemer into studies that later gained him academic recognition in Islamics. He also had opportunity to travel broadly in areas such as Europe, South Africa, India, and Indonesia, always with a view to learning about the Muslim world to which he felt called in ministry. After his years of service in first the Arabian peninsula and then Cairo, he was invited to take up the position of Professor of History of Religion and Christian Missions at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1929. His thirty-six years in editorship of *The Muslim World* (1911-1947) where he drew in the best known Islamists as contributors had made it so that he ‘stood in the larger company of respected scholars of the time.’ Yet at heart Zwemer saw himself as an evangelist with only limited experience. About his appointment to Princeton he wrote

‘My special study has been limited very largely to only one of the non-Christian religions and my experience has been in practical evangelism, rather than in the classroom. It is a far call from the camel’s saddle in Oman or a seat in a coffee shop in the bazaars of Cairo to a Professor’s chair. I count myself happy, however, henceforth to have a small part in promoting those high ideals of Christian ministry as a world-wide mission, for which Princeton has always stood.’

Some have interpreted his evangelistic approach to Islam as incompatible with true scholarship. Cragg even hinted at its being incompatible with true Christianity. Some of his earlier statements about Islam seem particularly open to criticism.

Historically, a pure theism is all but impotent. There is only one example of it on a large scale in the world, and that is a kind of bastard Christianity—Mohammedanism; and we all know what good that is as a religion.\(^{41}\)

Zwemer was equally critical about the moral character of the Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, from today’s perspective it is hard to understand how he could write in this way and still have the warm relations with Muslims he was reported to have had.

Educated Moslems find it very difficult to accept the Koran without explaining away its indictment of the Prophet.\(^{42}\)

Mohammed was not only guilty of breaking the old Arab laws, and coming infinitely short of the law of Christ; he never even kept the laws of which he claimed to be the divinely appointed medium and custodian. When Khadijah died he found his own law, lax as it was, insufficient to restrain his lusts. His followers were to be content with four lawful wives; according to tradition, he took to himself eleven lawful wives and two concubines.\(^{43}\)

A stream cannot rise higher than its source . . . The religion which Mohammed founded bears everywhere the imprint of his life and character. Mohammed was not only the prophet, but the *prophecy* of Islam.\(^{44}\)

In other words, the Prophet’s low moral character became a quality of Islam, according to Zwemer! In time, however, the strength of language changed.

Vander Werff summarised this shift in Zwemer’s writing.

Although Zwemer allowed his view of Islam as an animated system which stood or fell as a single entity to long influence his vocabulary, it is to his credit that he gradually changed his mind.\(^{45}\)

[In] 1915-1938 . . . a second approach [to Islam] gradually emerges and matures which can be described as anthropological and Christocentric. Without compromising his criticism of Islam as a system, he began a sympathetic study of the Muslim as a man needing and seeking God.\(^{46}\)

---


\(^{44}\) Emphasis the author’s. *Ibid.*, 52.


A key book marking this second approach was Zwemer’s *Disintegration of Islam* (1916).

Noting political as well as educational changes where one Islam was dying out and another being born, he was one of the first to predict the impending traditionalist-modernist controversy in Islam. Zwemer referred to the modernist perspective as a ‘New Islam’. It was to these modernists and their openness to innovative Quranic interpretation that Cragg later appeals for agreed understanding and interpretation (see 2.1.3.2). Unlike Cragg, Zwemer did not see hope in the Muslim modernists.

Yet our review of the New Islam and its future may well conclude by reminding ourselves of the scientific fact that hybrids do not propagate and by pointing out in the words of Tertullian that ‘men do not generally care to die for the compromises made between the faith of the Church and the philosophies of the heathen world.’

3.4.1.1 The cross and uniqueness of Christianity

Zwemer and Cragg each viewed the cross of Christ as both essential and missing from the Muslim Creed but with different application. Evangelism, with a view to eventual conversion, remained Zwemer’s unwavering motivation.

Islam, the greatest of all the non-Christian religions is not of divine but of human origin . . . and it is wholly inadequate, in spite of much that is true, to meet man’s need intellectually, spiritually, or morally, as proved by its own history; therefore the present condition of Moslem lands with their unprecedented opportunities and crises, and the work which has already been accomplished, are a challenge to evangelise the whole Mohammedan world in this generation.

---

47 Emphasis original; Zwemer, *Disintegration of Islam*, 178.
Cragg, on the other hand, sought understanding from the mind of Islam, where it could see the relevance of the cross on its own terms. Zwemer maintained his position throughout his life, including the years after his return from the Middle East when he took up a full-time professorship.

The missionary enterprise is to make disciples of all nations for Christ, not merely to share our own experiences with those of other faiths. The Jerusalem Council message in 1928 asserted unequivocally and without compromise the finality and absoluteness of Jesus Christ.49

Still it must be said that though his evangelistic motivation never wavered, Zwemer took his study of Islam seriously. It was this that won him academic respect and could be seen as a comparable rather than contrasting trait to Cragg.

[Christians are] to find avenues of approach and points of contact with those of other faiths by a thorough and sympathetic study of what is best in their creeds and conduct. Only by such scholarly effort and painstaking approach can we learn the values of the non-Christian religions and the value of those values.50

However, in contrast to Cragg, Zwemer maintained a suppositional base of the uniqueness and superiority of Christianity.

... the history of Christianity can be rightly understood only when one has studied the non-Christian religions which have borrowed so much and from which Christianity has borrowed so little; and above all, to which it stands in sharp contrast as the religion of Revelation and Redemption.51

This meant there could only be one stance towards Islam or any other religion Christianity and the non-Christian religions are two distinct conceptions. Their real relation, therefore, when they come into contact is that of impact, and not of compromise. Christianity is distinct in its origin. Its revelation is supernatural, and its Founder was the Lord from heaven.... The missionary character of Christianity, therefore, demands impact with every non-Christian system.52

50 Ibid., 41.
51 Ibid., 41.
52 Samuel M. Zwemer, Christianity, The Final Religion, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma,
With these differing perspectives on Islam, it is not surprising Zwemer and Cragg also had differing approaches to scriptural questions.

3.4.2 Scriptural issues

By approaching Islam as chronologically AD but informationally BC (see 2.1.3.1), Cragg was free to interpret the Qurʾān as preparation for the gospel of the New Testament. It was a Scripture for the Arabs and was an improvement over the animism of that time. Zwemer, on the other hand and to the end of his life, interpreted Islam as a retrograde step, a heresy of Christianity.

The history of Islam . . . is not the evolution of a people from animism to monotheism, but of a people, once monotheistic, under the influence of a new religion (which was nevertheless in part old), and which was borrowed from Christianity and Judaism as well as from Arabian paganism.53

The same was true for Islam’s scripture, the Qurʾān.

3.4.2.1 The Qurʾān

Zwemer’s early assessments of the Qurʾān were stark and negative. ‘How much loftier is the thought of God’s omniscience in the 139th Psalm than in any verse of the Koran or any passage of the Traditions.’54 With time, however, Zwemer became a student of the Qurʾān, particularly once his approach changed to a more serious study of Islam after 1915. One significant contribution Zwemer made to Islamic scholarship was a thorough investigation of all translations of the Qurʾān into other languages, including

1920, 42.
54 Zwemer, Moslem Doctrine of God, 56.
those of the Far East. However, and typically, this study was accompanied by
his own assessment of the Qur'ān's relative value to the Bible.

The contrast between the Arabic Koran and the Bible, the Book for all
nations, is strikingly evident. . . . we have nothing to fear from modern
Koran translations; rather may we not hope that the contrast between the
Bible and the Koran will be evident to all readers when they compare them
in their vernacular?55

Right to the end of his academic and writing career, his opinion of the Qur'ān
did not change. 'It throws together fact and fancy. . . . The defects of its
teachings are many and its historical errors evident even to the casual
reader.'56 Zwemer's approach stands in contrast to Cragg's, who generally
accepts the Qur'ān not only as a Scripture for Arabs but also as a Scripture for
all. The rhythm and poetry of the Qur'ān referred to by Zwemer as 'musical
jingle' or 'cadence', Cragg sees as an important aspect of revelation. Zwemer
sees this as a liability rather than an asset.

The difficulty with the Koran is that it is in a sense untranslatable. To
imitate its rhyme and rhythm is impossible. Its beauty is altogether in its
style, and, therefore, necessarily artificial. For the sake of the rhyme
unnecessary repetitions are frequently made, which interrupt the sense of
the passage and sometimes even appear ridiculous in a translation.57

Zwemer, like Cragg, noticed the lack of chronology in the Qur'ān, stating 'the
book has no logical order or sequence.'58 Neither is there an identifiable
history.

It is remarkable that there is no definite date given to any event in the
Koran. And there is also a marked absence of place-names. Only from
tradition do we know anything of when or where the various chapters
were revealed.59

56 Zwemer, Cross Above the Crescent, 218.
57 Zwemer, Mohammed or Christ, 157.
58 Zwemer, Cross Above the Crescent, 218.
59 Zwemer, Mohammed or Christ, 157.
Cragg uses the fact of the existence of the hadith to argue that the Qur'ān should be studied critically and interpreted situationally (seeking out chronology and history). Zwemer simply interprets this as yet another evidence of its inferiority to the Bible. ‘The whole Koran...contains far less geography and chronology than one chapter of the Acts or of the Synoptic Gospels.’ Despite Zwemer’s and Cragg’s mutually strong Christian commitment coupled with scholarly input on Islam, it seems the best way to summarise a comparison of their approaches to the Qur’ān is with the word ‘dissimilarity’.

3.4.2.2 The Bible

Zwemer’s writings seem to indicate that he only grappled with a theology of Christian Scriptures later in his career after he returned to the United States. Earlier references to the Bible were largely confined to issues of distribution. Like Gairdner, Zwemer saw evangelistic value in its distribution. The Bible itself had power as the Word of God.

There are few places even in the most inaccessible and most difficult of the unoccupied fields where, by tact and patience, an open door may not be found for the entrance of the Word of God. It has long since crossed the Afghan border, is known in Lhasa, has readers at Mecca and Meshed, and goes where no missionary can yet enter. Bible distribution... is doubtless one of the best pioneer agencies. In addition to brief comparisons where the inadequacies of the Qur’ān are shown up by the Bible, according to Zwemer, he later went on to make blanket statements of the Bible’s superiority over other Scriptures in the world.

The Bible, in contrast to the Koran, has this unique quality, that it can be rendered into all the languages of mankind without losing its majesty,

---

60 Ibid., 157
beauty, and spiritual power. The secret lies in the subject-matter of the Scriptures.

'The Bible belongs to those elemental things – like the sky and the wind and the sea, like bread and wine, like the kisses of little children and tears shed beside the grave – which can never grow stale or obsolete or out of date, because they are the common heritage of mankind. This Book goes down to the root of our bitterest needs, our darkest sorrows.' (Report of British and Foreign Bible Society, 1913-14)⁶²

[We] hope for the day when Christian scholars will regard the Scriptures not only as a source-book but as 'the infallible rule of faith and practice' in the comparative study of religion.⁶³

It was not until one of his last and arguably his most popular book, The Cross Above the Crescent (1941), that Zwemer dealt with the question of Christian Scriptures at somewhat greater length.

Today in every Moslem land the Battle of the Books is on. Every Christian colporteur is a captain in the fight. Every bookshop is a battlefield; every tract a missile of truth against error. Christian literature is the hammer of God, more powerful than that of Charles Martel at Tours.⁶⁴

Zwemer's chapter 'The Battle of the Books' demonstrates a theology of Christian Scriptures which is in keeping with that of the Westminster Confession and B. B. Warfield where the Bible is referred to as the Word of God but not Christ (see 4.5.1). This is not surprising given Zwemer's Reformed background and Presbyterian B. B. Warfield's influential presence at Princeton. It seems that Zwemer was making a statement as much to address the theological controversies in the United States at that time as he was continuing his mission to Islam.

In the last analysis all the sacred books of the non-Christian religions are a challenge to the supremacy, the finality and the sufficiency of God's Word. We can meet that challenge and vindicate the finality and sufficiency of the Bible .... [for] the Christian Scriptures stand in a class aloof and alone. And

⁶² Zwemer, Mohammed or Christ, 157.
⁶³ Zwemer, Origin of Religion, 38.
⁶⁴ Zwemer, Cross Above the Crescent, 225.
this is true in a special sense when compared with the Koran, the sacred scriptures of Islam.\textsuperscript{65}

Not only were Christian Scriptures final and sufficient but they had enormous influence when distributed. Zwemer attributed changes in the morals of the Muslim world to the influence coming from the Bible as the Word of God.

[The Bible] has created a new moral sense among Mohammedans. The old ideas no longer satisfy when you circulate the Scriptures. This book produces moral bankruptcy in the heart of every man who reads it and sees himself in its light. When Moslems see themselves in the mirror of the Bible they can no longer accept the ideals of the Koran.\textsuperscript{66}

The revolt against polygamy, against child marriage and slavery in the Moslem press today can not be explained apart from the direct and indirect influence of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{67}

Thus we see Zwemer's high view of Christian Scriptures and his understanding of them as the Word of God. However, though the Westminster Confession (1643), arguably the major Confession of the Presbyterian Church at that time and so of Princeton Seminary where Zwemer was a Professor, never once refers to Christ as the Word of God, Zwemer did.

The Apostles began the Battle of the Books. It will not end until the Word of God rides triumphant at Armageddon, and the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ. Then all the other sacred books will be 'wood, hay, stubble,' but 'the word of God abideth forever, for is not my word as a hammer and as fire, saith the Lord, that breaketh the rock in pieces?'\textsuperscript{68}

In this usage, the Word of God is Christ and the 'word of God' the Bible.

While Zwemer generally did not make the theological shift of comparing the Qur'an to Christ, rather than the Qur'an to the Bible, he did end up having a methodological framework which would allow for it. Perhaps the reason he

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 215.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 221-2.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 224-5.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 226.
did not make this comparison was that he could not accept the Qur'ān in any way as revelation or Scripture, even for the Arabs. It had no validity, according to him. Nevertheless his theological stance in the above quote indicates an open door for such a comparison. It came about when colonialism was on the wane and the Muslim world demanded that the attention given to it be more on its own terms. It then became important to communicate in a different way.

3.4.3 Summary

Cragg's and Zwemer's approaches to Islam must largely be seen as contrasting ones. But this statement must be taken with some qualifications. Zwemer's language can easily be interpreted as unfairly prejudiced against Islam. However, his personal relations with Muslims seemed to be of the highest order with regard to respect and dignity. In today's post-colonial world it is easy to see his language as unacceptable. That aspect, however, was undoubtedly a product of his times. We see no indications of anthropological imperialism, of 'a white man's burden' in Zwemer. Cragg took this sympathetic understanding of others a step further into religious faith. Zwemer, by and large, did not.

Zwemer was also influenced by the theological issues of his time which are easier to identify now than they were then. Yet behind this there was a deep and true scholarship of Islam and a careful theological perspective as a Christian. In his lifetime he changed and would have changed more had he lived longer. Perhaps his biases are easier to spot than those of today's writers,
where it is customary to use words more diplomatically. Zwemer was a giant, but like most, he was a giant in his time. As we will see, Cragg too is affected by the theology of his times, parts of which in retrospect may appear to be naive, as they now do with Zwemer.

### 3.5 Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Kenneth Cragg

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, too, has changed his theological perspective during the course of his lifetime. Unlike the others we have reviewed, however, the change has, at times, been more dramatic than subtle. Cragg goes so far as to describe a kind of ‘conversion’, one which took him away from Marxism and into a type of religious quest (*Troubled by Truth* 1992, 243). In actual fact, there seem to be three identifiable periods in Smith’s life which can be distinguished in his writing. His earliest book, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* 1946) is the work of an ideological socialist strongly influenced by Marx’s theory of economics. In introducing this book Smith writes, ‘This present book is definitely written from a point of view. I am a socialist with pronounced ethical convictions.’ For the second period, Ipema quotes Smith’s own description of it as a time when he ‘was engaged in a search for an understanding of Islam.’ This period roughly coincides with his time as Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University. *Islam in Modern History*, which analyses various aspects of Islamic self-definition in the twentieth century, is considered to be a seminal work and can be taken as

---

70 Ipema, ‘Islam Interpretation,’ 59.
representative of this time. Its perspective is markedly different from that of his first book of a decade earlier. Cragg praises it with the description, ‘What he later believed to be his maturer mind was admirably documented and distilled in *Islam in Modern History*’ (*Troubled by Truth* 1992, 243).

The beginning of the third period coincided with Smith’s research in India in 1963-4 where his horizons further broadened in religions besides Islam. This change was marked by another seminal work, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. In 1964 he accepted an appointment at Harvard as Professor of World Religions where he also became the Director of the Centre for the Study of World Religions. Along with a change in his area of speciality, so too came another shift of emphasis in his writings. He described the change as follows:

> For a century now serious historical studies have made major advances in uncovering and making known what I am calling the cumulative traditions of mankind’s religious life. The next step is to discover and make known the personal faith of men that those traditions have served. This can be done, I affirm, by treating the observable items of the traditions as clues to the understanding of a personal and living quality of the men whose faith they have expressed.

Because we cannot possibly do justice to Smith’s theological perspective in the brief space available and yet, on the other hand, we cannot ignore him because of his stature in the areas of both comparative religions and Islamics, we focus our study narrowly. First we (briefly) place Smith in his time and culture. We then note selected concepts which have implications for his approach to Islam and his understanding of Scriptures in areas which particularly relate to Cragg’s theological approach.

---

3.5.1 General Approaches to Islam: Modernity versus Post-Modernity

We have seen how historians looking back on Zwemer and Gairdner must take into account the colonial mindset of the times if they are to appreciate their contributions. The unquestionable superiority of the Bible and the motivation for the conversion of Muslims remained central to both Gairdner’s and Zwemer’s beliefs. Though both were learners about Islam, neither would have seen it as their vocation to be learners from Islam and its Qur’an.

Nevertheless the seeds for this next step were there. Both moved towards a greater understanding of revelatory issues part of which was a comparing of Christ to the Qur’an, which opened the door for a type of acceptance of the Qur’an, even if only as ‘a bridge to the cross’.

Both Cragg and Smith took matters farther. Changing times made a new theology necessary. John Hick described the problem well.

For centuries Christendom . . .  was able to dismiss the wider religious life of humanity as pagan superstition. However, the modern explosion of information . . .  and the many-directional migrations of millions of people . . .  have all contributed to a new awareness both of the continuing strength and of the immense diversity of the great religious traditions of the world. This recognition has stimulated interest in . . .  problems of religious pluralism. . .  Today there is a widespread, though still by no means universal, reaction against the old dogmatic intolerance. But the emerging sense of a universal human community, embracing a variety of different forms of religious experience and thought, still needs what [Wilfred Cantwell] Smith calls a world theology.74

It is relatively easy to see the influence of the philosophy of the times in retrospect — such as the colonial mindset of Zwemer and Gairdner. It is

73 Ibid., 170.
74 John Hick, ‘Preface,’ in Hughes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith.
impossible, however, to have the same perspective on the present. Nevertheless it is useful to have models not so much to categorise as to understand better. Although there are many ways in which Smith's background can be compared to that of Zwemer, Gairdner and Cragg, the shore on which he has landed is quite different from any of them. Time can explain the difference from Smith to Zwemer and Gairdner; it cannot explain it for Cragg who is a contemporary of Smith. Jones, himself an evangelical, classifies the difference as liberal (Smith) and evangelical (Cragg). He notes that the difference arises out of different presuppositions.

If first-hand acquaintance leads to such divergent findings, we have to ask why... Smith and Cragg bring to their interpretations of Islam prior cultural and Christian criteria for selecting what 'Islam' means to them.\(^75\)

What his thesis lacks is any significant analysis of these 'prior cultural and Christian criteria' which each brings to his study of Islam. While it is not the task of our thesis to perform such a study\(^76\) we do undertake to consider major differences in approach and seek to understand how far Cragg and Smith fit a particular model of understanding which is popular with many current religious and secular scholars, i.e., modernity and post-modernity. Our thesis is that there are several of aspects of Cragg's writings which would classify him as belonging in the 'modernity' camp, while some of Smith's later works might be more usefully understood as 'post-modernist'. Just as the colonial mindset is reflected in the approaches to Islam of Zwemer and Gairdner, so, we argue, modernity and post-modernity are identifiable in the theologies of

\(^75\) *Ibid.*, 152.

\(^76\) To a considerable degree, Lamb has actually done this with Cragg in the early chapters of his thesis.
Cragg and Smith. This analysis is well in keeping with John Hick's description of the changing world circumstances which have led to the need for a new world theology.

3.5.1.1 Modernity defined

One common definition of modernity is 'the set of changes in social structure and consciousness which have accompanied the rise of technological societies since the mid-eighteenth century.' There are those such as David Wells, however, who make a finer distinction, using two terms, 'modernity' and 'modernism'. He interprets modernity to mean the underlying assumptions of modern thought and life which arise out of the eighteenth century Enlightenment but continue to find expression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The term 'modernism' Wells reserves to describe what is more concrete and visible. This includes the obvious dramatic technical and material changes. Others, like Akhbar Ahmad, use the words interchangeably.

Modernism [sic. Modernity] has come to mean the most recent phase of world history marked by belief in science, planning, secularism and progress. The period is noted for its confidence in the future, a conviction that Utopia is attainable, that there is a natural world order which is possible.

While modernism and modernity are undoubtedly connected, the distinction Wells makes is a useful clarification which makes for a more precise analysis. Thus it is his basic terminology and definition which we use.

---

79 Akbar S. Ahmad, Postmodernism and Islam, London: Routledge, 1992, 6; See also, Fazlur
Modernity, thus, is the product of a philosophical mindset which began with the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment brought a change to the basis of values in European society. Morality, for instance, came to be based on reason and universal values which were held to be common to all. It was no longer rooted in traditional concepts such as the character of God as understood in the Bible. Because of the emphasis on the universal ideal, modernity has had the effect of creating a mindset that what is shared is what has real value. In popular culture, what is shared may be little more than the trivial. Thus in a western city Muslims and Christians alike can make a public confession of belief consisting of support for the local football team but social values that dictate their religion must remain in the private, personal realm. Football can be shared because it is common. Religion cannot, because it is not common. Modernity accepts that God may be there but only where there is common understanding of God does it come to be valued by society. Conversely, in a Muslim country such as Pakistan, which has yet to be affected fully by this ideology, religious differences are popular discussion topics in casual conversation, while discussion on sporting events can be frowned on as being trivial, inconsequential and, on occasion, even anti-religious. Because the topic of modernity has been studied by representatives from a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences from all backgrounds, including Muslims (albeit usually Muslims who have been influenced by western philosophical thought), it is a useful paradigm for a general analysis of Cragg’s and Smith’s presuppositions.

3.5.1.2 Cragg: an unconscious modernist

On the surface it would seem an unlikely charge that modernity, as such, is a major influential ideology in Cragg’s writing. Religious issues divide and thus modernity normally relegates religion to the place of personal and private. Yet Cragg tackles even the most controversial of religious topics. In doing so, however, he is known for seeking greater understanding between Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, his writing is more than just a compassionate understanding of Islam by a Christian. He stretches boundaries of traditional understanding to considerable lengths to find common ground between Christianity and Islam. This methodology bears the mark of modernity. The fact that he also remains loyal to his Christian faith by finding that much of the common ground consists of basic Christian truths which are discernible in Islam does not negate our argument. His presuppositions still assume there is a rational, common ground. It is this that is a characteristic of modernity.

The Šīrah, or life-course [of Muhammad] . . . is squarely within the burning issue of pre-Gethsemane, namely how a truth, and its hearer, believed to be God’s, appropriately respond to the obduracy of the hostile world. The political decision, by which Islam lives and to which the Prophet came, carries within itself the counter-relevance of the other decision by which Jesus defined and achieved Messiahship. Christian theology is, therefore not on alien ground in the territory of Muhammad’s Mecca. . . . In the study of Islam [Christians] are squarely within the dimensions of the gospel. They are involved in an act of translation by which an issue, basic to all truth and ‘establishment’, is read when translated from the language of power into the language of grace (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 12).

He argues the legitimacy for such an approach on the grounds of logic.

If we are serious about a theology of other faiths we cannot be content to find ourselves under the constraints of a Canon and a concept of Scripture so unilateral in their character. . . . Should we look for outlines of what Christhood means only in Hebraic sources? Joseph and Jonah, for example, have served well as partial types. Are there none in the literature of Asia? . . . Surely the antecedents of all discipleship should find their way into
[the Canon's] ecumenical confession. Otherwise we would have to conclude that the Canon of Christian Scripture had been both premature in time and parochial in content and on both counts a problematic servant of a fiducia in Christ for all mankind (emphasis original; ibid., 332-3).

Cragg in no way makes light of the differences between the faiths. He avoids no issue on the basis of its being controversial. Yet it is vital to remember that in seeking Christ in other faiths he sometimes resolves the discrepancies through idiosyncratic and personal interpretations of key words and concepts in both Christianity and Islam. As a result he has been accused of christianising Islam or ‘finding’ common ground where others see none.

Why does Cragg insist that the orthodox Islamic mechanism should be replaced by the dynamic model of revelation? The question in a polemical context could invite an answer in terms of motives, which is certainly one place where one finds it.... Could it be then, the Christians need partners in adversity, — want Muslims to start walking the same road to ruin?.... it is hard to avoid the suspicion that Cragg has some Christian manifesto behind the probing of Muslim confidence about scripture.80

In his defence of Islam, what Akhtar fails to see is that while Cragg’s content may be ‘Christian’, the presuppositions of his approach are those of modernity which others have come to share besides Christians. This presses for a common ground which others either cannot see or reject outright.

Cragg further matches our definition of modernity above when he either treats lightly or dismisses those aspects of Islam or Christianity which are closely linked to particular peoples or cultures. His dismissal of the Islamic concept of ‘state’ (see 2.8.2) and the shari‘ah (law) necessary for it is one example of this. Another is his low view of the value of the ‘ethnic’ Jewish links in the Old Testament (see 5.1.1) and of the reliance of the New Testament on those links

80 Shabbir Akhtar, ‘An Islamic Model of Revelation,’ Islam and Christian Muslim Relations
(see 4.3). Because these cannot be part of a common ground, they become unimportant.

Finally it is important to note that Cragg began his serious consideration of interfaith questions right at the end of the time when at least some leading intellectual leadership of the Muslim world were embracing western thought and with it modernism. Smith in his earliest writing, when he still shared a modernist world view, described one such Muslim. He saw this prototype as the wave of the future.

A young Muslim, fashionably dressed, sits with his friends in the Lahore Coffee House and talks, in English, of Marx or tennis. He has perhaps never studied the Qur'an, and dislikes what he knows of the Canon Law. Yet he is intensely conscious of being a Muslim... His philosophy and way of life have much in common with those of many young men to-day in, say, London...

How did this development take place? How did Islam, recently the religion of a mediaeval community, become the religion of capitalists, liberals, implacable nationalists, and of socialist dreamers?

Needless to say the traditional reaction to modernism in the Muslim world led to the decline and influence of such people. The Pakistan movement, created and shaped by modernists such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and later the nation's founder, Qaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was ideologically hijacked by the traditionalists. Western scholarship, because of its modernist mindset, was slow to acknowledge the rise of traditionalism in Pakistan. Smith was actually quicker than most to change.

81 Smith, Islam in India, 8.
This period immediately following World War II was also a watershed for the modern missions movement, which, to a large extent, had hitch-hiked into the developing world on the vehicle of colonialism. The days of easy visas and missionaries being able to say and do as they wished without jeopardising their positions was fast coming to an end, particularly in the Muslim world. The need for greater understanding, both religiously and culturally, was becoming the order of the day. It was for these reasons that Cragg's two earliest books *The Call of the Minaret* (1956) and *Sandals at the Mosque* (1959) were so well received and acclaimed by the Christian mission world, including evangelicals. Those books represented, however, more than a compassionate understanding of Islam from a Christian faith position. They represented the beginnings of a philosophical change which became more clear in Cragg's later writings. This change can be understood, at least partially, as being influenced by modernity in its search for universal, common truth.

### 3.5.1.3 Post-modernity defined

Post-modernity is often better understood through its popular expression than through definition.

While sociologists and philosophers — like Gellner and Giddens in the United Kingdom, Lyotard and Baudrillard in Europe — attempt to explain the postmodernist age we live in, public media figures — like Madonna and Rushdie — personify it for the millions through their lives.\(^2\)

Post-modernity, almost by definition, cannot be defined. Nevertheless, it is still identifiable. It is characterised by a move away from *common* values to individualised (either small cultural groupings or personal) cultures/beliefs,

---

each with no more ‘value’ than another. The pressure to conform that came
with modernity is gone and in its place there is a type of acceptance of
differences, bordering on what would have been deemed as bizarre in earlier
generations. Post-modernity is a reaction to modernity and its naive
assumption that common global values can be achieved.

To approach an understanding of the postmodernist age is to presuppose a
questioning of, a loss of faith in, the project of modernity; a spirit of
pluralism; a heightened scepticism of traditional orthodoxies; and finally a
rejection of a view of the world as a universal totality, of the expectation of
final solutions and complete answers.\(^3\)

The recent rise in consciousness of ethnic identity is undoubtedly as least
partially due to a reaction of traditional culture to the emerging global culture.

One premise of this critique is that traditional ‘backlash’ is actually parallel to
post-modernity in the West and grows out of the influence of modernity on
countries as yet less influenced by western thought, much as post-modernity
has grown out of modernity in the West. This argument would be supported
by the general approach of Benjamin Barber’s book, *Jihad vs. McWorld*.\(^4\) Jihad
are those traditional values which react against modernism (McWorld) and
create backlashes of ethnicity. Responses to the McWorld culture in the West
are driven by much the same forces, according to Barber. Akbar Ahmed would
agree with him.

The connection between postmodernist and ethno-religious revivalism —
or fundamentalism — needs to be explored by social and political scientists.
Postmodernists, it would appear, are better philosophers than they are
anthropologists. While noting the fragmentation of social and political
ideas and shifts in thought, postmodernists fail to link this process with the
revival of ethnicity and religious fundamentalism . . . . Thus
fundamentalism is the attempt to resolve how to live in a world of radical
doubt. It is a dialogue with the times, a response to it.\(^5\)

\(^3\) Ibid., 10.
With the onslaught of modernity in traditional societies, families are afraid of losing their children and their social support in their old age. Modernism has threatened to break down centuries' old social structures. Ethnic violence and religious fundamentalism are reactions to this. The revolution in Iran and the massacre in Rwanda can both partially be explained by traditional reaction to an emerging global, modernity culture. Like post-modernity, traditionalism soundly rejects universal, common good. Its blatant ethnicity flies in the face of Enlightenment values. But unlike much of post-modernity in the West, traditional reaction is often strongly grounded in highly religious, moral value systems. This is particularly true for the fundamentalist reactions coming out of the Muslim world.

Smith's western academic approach, later challenged by his engagement with Islam, has produced a theology which, too, can be interpreted as a reaction to modernity. There are aspects of it which are post-modernist but his insistence on morality and ethics along with the ability to discern superior moral values are also reminiscent of responses traditional societies have made to modernism and its philosophical underpinning, modernity.

3.5.1.4 Smith and post-modernity

Cragg, in writing about Smith, notes that he makes his arguments through the 'careful, insistent definition of basic terms' (Troubled by Truth 1992, 244). Two such terms are 'faith' and 'belief' which he also describes as 'cumulative tradition'. All of human religious life can be best or perhaps only understood
through these two concepts, according to Smith. Edward Hughes explains how he interprets ‘faith’.

Faith as a capacity for meaning, when actualised, becomes faith as a realised quality. A person finding ultimate meaning has entered into a state of faithfulness through a response to transcendence. This process normally occurs when an individual is in contact with his/her religious tradition, which expresses the faith of earlier generations. In most instances, this pattern is given by one’s tradition, though creative persons (and in some degree all persons) in turn modify their tradition.

Belief, on the other hand, is the self-aware holding to certain doctrines. This is contrasted to faith which is often unaware. Smith argues that this concept of belief, has, in actual fact, become prevalent only since the Enlightenment. He attributes the Enlightenment (modernity by our definition) with destroying the traditional understanding of faith and seeing the core of religious life rather as belief.

That the attention of leaders of thought in the Enlightenment, whatever their achievements rationally, had in the religious realm been diverted and even squandered on an increasingly arid intellectualism, could not fail to elicit finally a protest and recall on the part of the more devout. While the thinkers and the elite were evolving their new notions which came to dominate the intellectual life of the times, the common people were affected by them only partially, being open at the same time to the deeper piety of the tradition.

Smith argues that it is, in fact, ‘faithing’ that is the primary religious activity. Thus religions, according to Smith, are ‘cumulative traditions’, which are but indications of true religiosity, that is, personal faith. Smith’s belief and faith distinction is quite close to the idea of Buber’s two faiths. The one is a faith of

---

Hughes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 8.
Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, 44.
relationship, not founded on any objective data. The other is a belief where 'I acknowledge a thing to be true.'

Despite his rejection of Enlightenment’s philosophy (modernity), Smith’s quest for a world theology could, on the surface, be interpreted as a quest well in keeping with modernity. Instead of seeking the universal from the Christian perspective, as Cragg does, it could be said that Smith tries to give everybody an equal run at it. This, however, is not the whole picture. Smith insists that only people within a particular religious tradition have the right to interpret it. Outsiders cannot and should not interpret another religion, as their efforts will undoubtedly carry elements of religious imperialism with them, pitting one belief system against another. ‘One community’s faith is on principle precluded from being the object of another community’s theology. Faith can be theologised only from inside.’

It is in just this kind of assertion that we detect elements of post-modernity. While Smith’s approach avoids the criticism of imposing Christianity that Cragg’s approach has fostered, it also has its drawbacks. Smith does not seek common ground of understanding; rather what is important to him are faith transcending belief systems, which are actually only ‘cumulative traditions’ that tell something about the faith. Edward Hughes further explains Smith’s perspective.

Just as Copernicus upset mankind’s perception of the unique status of the earth by recognising it as one of several planets moving round the sun, so too Christians have recently realised that their form of faith represents but one legitimate apprehension of the Real. With Christianity no longer at the

---

centre of the religious world, each religion can be recognised as having a partial perspective on the divine. Unfortunately, Christian theology has not seriously considered the practical and theoretical consequences of this reconceptualization.91

In his move towards a 'world theology', Smith has given up the quest for a rational common ground such as was seen in his earliest book Modern Islam in India. He even goes so far as to note that it would not be irreverent or facetious to say 'It is only by becoming in part Hindu that a Westerner is enabled to be both Christian and Muslim at the same time.'92

Cragg, particularly, takes issue with Smith's perspective that outsiders cannot interpret other faiths. He characterises it as

Smith's strange unwillingness to allow any inter-penetration of theologies in order that they may only meet in 'corporate consciousness', as an 'internationalism' without 'nations' (Troubled by Truth 1992, 260).

Cragg further argues there is an individualism in Smith's approach which is a travesty against Islam. The consensus of the community is important in interpretation and Smith's approach ignores that (ibid., 254). Although Cragg does not overtly make such a statement, the essence of his charge is that Smith's approach is as much religious imperialism as anything that Cragg has been accused of.

Thus we can see that the argument against Cragg given by Muslims and some others can be understood as a form of argument against modernity. They object to his universalising approach which interprets (or reinterprets in some cases as we shall later argue) Christianity in Islam. The charge Cragg brings

91 Hughes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 194-5.
against Smith is a rejection of a post-modernist outlook where there can be no outside possessing and interpreting of Islam by Christians, or by any non-Muslims for that matter. Cragg, instead, sees that there is a vital role the outsider has to play in such an interpretation.

3.5.2 Revelation and Scriptures

Smith rejects what he calls ‘the big bang theory’ of religion. By this he means

...the notion that a religion begins with one great seismic event, as it were: a cosmic happening within history, in the reverberations and resonances of whose explosive power down the succeeding ages subsequent generations of the faithful live.93

Not surprisingly, Smith believes christology is the major block in the way of Christians wishing to come to a world theology. He sees it as the very core of Christian exclusivism.94 Cragg argues that such a position seriously calls into question the all-important ‘Christ event’ which he sees is at the very heart of Christianity.

Faith in Jesus, Messiah crucified, is simply the Christian shape of faith as the humane science to which Christians belong. Its efficacy, or validity, for them does not constitute it a clue or a crux to meaning for all. Mission with it, at best, can only be an invitation and not an urgent kerygma. The kerygmatic Christianity of the New Testament differs only in form, and not in kind, from any human faith open to transcendence (Troubled by Truth 1992, 256).

The Christ event is at the heart of Cragg’s theology, even though he too abhors exclusivism. This is why he needs to find the Christ event in Islam. Indeed,

93 Smith, Towards a World Theology, 155.
94 Hughes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 194.
Lamb, in assessing Cragg's theological method, even goes so far as to ask the question if Cragg is not 'unduly Christocentric'.

Smith further explains that instead of the 'big bang theory' where something happened once and only needs to be interpreted in each generation, religion is more a 'continuous creation'. "To understand the role in human life of oaks, one must study more than acorns," Smith writes.

This concept has far-reaching implications for concepts of revelation and Scripture. The question of comparing Christ to the Qur'an as a revelation to a revelation, rather than the Bible to the Qur'an as Scripture to Scripture, is a moot point with Smith. He rejects any idea that a beginning event in a religion can be or even become its revelation.

I reject a first-century theory of revelation, as intellectually untenable today along with modern knowledge... Western thought... got pushed into a corner from which God's and even Christ's revelation seemed personally and historically remote... Muslim thinkers have been pushed in the same direction.

Like Cragg, Smith sees revelation as an ongoing process of interaction between the giver and the receiver. Unlike Cragg, however, Smith sees Western scholarship's preoccupation with exploring 'original revelations' as based on the faulty assumption that it is here that they can find the real meaning of religion. This interpretation should only be carried out by those to whom the revelation, tradition or Scripture belongs. This, of course, is in direct

---

95 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 50.
96 Smith, *What is Scripture?* 83.
97 Ibid., 84.
contradiction to Cragg's approach where a study of the Qur'an is essential in order to get to its true meaning and not be bound by rigid interpretations set in place and time through *tafsîr* or *hadîth*.

This is not to say that Smith does not take the question of the Scriptures of various faiths seriously. Indeed, his quarrel with western scholars is that they study Scriptures as if they were not Scriptures. Although they may be limited, they cannot be reduced to a human document like other writing. Hughes illustrates this through explaining Smith's understanding of the Qur'an.

Smith argues that the divine Word made available to Muhammad was limited in expression and comprehension by the capacities of Arabian culture and the personality of the Prophet. The divine reality is both revealed and veiled in the Qur'an, which may be thought of as 'the closest approximation to the Eternal Word that Muhammad could rise to'.

This explains how reserving the right of interpretation to those who possess the scripture is more than just a question of religious imperialism (though that, too, is an issue for Smith). Others are simply unable to do such interpretation because they do not belong. This understanding of Scripture, too, is post-modernist, a wide acceptance and even a type of incorporation of divergent views.

Cragg, in objecting to this position, argues that Scriptures will have a different role from the one they have been commonly understood to fulfil in the past.

---

They ‘will now be possessed in terms, not of authority to monopolise what faith means, but to witness to historical data concerning it.’ Outsiders cannot interpret them; rather the Scriptures come to the world ‘via their custodian-receivers who, as we have seen, alone “know” them, are “witness-bearing” not “truth-refereeing”’ (Troubled by Truth 1992, 251). Cragg further notes:

This will be in every case strictly an internal liberty — though it is hard to see how there can be mutuality in the meaning witnessed and not in the exegesis which discerned it (ibid.).

Cragg’s concern is clearly visible in Smith’s later writing. More recently Smith has probed questions of Scripture more carefully.

Fundamental, we suggest, to a new understanding of scripture is the recognition that no text is a scripture in itself and as such. People — a given community — make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way.

I suggest: scripture is a human activity.101

By this Smith means that there has been, throughout history, an inclination on the part of humans to scripturalise. Scripture is part of the ‘cumulative tradition’ and not the essence of faith.

3.5.3 Approaches to the New and Old Testaments

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, not surprisingly, Smith has difficulty with aspects of Paul’s writings in the New Testament. ‘If St Paul . . . thinks that only Christians can be saved, St Paul was wrong.’102 Hughes notes that for Smith ‘Paul’s exclusivism needs to be interpreted in a personal manner, either

---

101 Emphasis the author’s. Smith, What is Scripture? 18.
102 Smith, Towards a World Theology, 171.
as a zealous error, or as a statement about his disenchantment with legalism.\footnote{103} Cragg, on the other hand, has little or no difficulty with Paul. His writings reflect the responsive quality of revelation, where the Christian community takes in and lives out what it has received from God. The Christ event is for all and to some extent discernible in Islam. For Smith this understanding of Christ is too Christian and not universal enough for a true world theology.

On the other hand, Smith would not have as much trouble with the Old Testament as Cragg seems to have (see 5.1). That God comes through a particular culture (which Cragg interprets as ethnicity) fits perfectly well with his concept of cumulative traditions making up one of the two-fold aspects within which all religion must be understood, faith and belief. The coming of Christ and the New Testament's move to universalise the Christian faith is what presents a problem for him.

3.5.4 Summary

We have seen how revelation not Scripture is the issue for Cragg. For Smith neither is the issue but both are pointers to a world theology in which personal faith is at the core. The kind of careful study Cragg does of the Qur'an would be invalid if we take Smith's position at face value. Similarly Cragg's efforts at holding to Christian basics and seeing many of them in one form or another in Islam could be construed as nothing short of religious imperialism by Smith. Nevertheless, the two scholars have maintained a cordial and mutually

\footnote{103 Hughes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 190.}
respectful relationship through the years. Though they have widely diverging theological perspectives, their scholarship, mutual respect for Islam and an honest personal faith are common points.

### 3.6 Kenneth Bailey and Kenneth Cragg

Until his retirement in 1995 Kenneth Bailey spent his entire working life in the Middle East as a developing scholar and Presbyterian missionary first in Egypt, then in Lebanon and Jerusalem, and finally in Cyprus. He is the author of several works on the New Testament. His written work has been welcomed by scholars, particularly on the parables of Jesus. He has been the Chairman of the Biblical Studies Department of the Near Eastern School of Theology, Beirut, and was later at the Tantur Study Centre near Jerusalem. Bailey has made a significant contribution to Protestant Christian witness in the Middle East through his culturally sensitive interpretation of different parts of the Bible.

Despite a lifetime of service in the Middle East, none of Kenneth Bailey’s writings overtly engage with Islam. Rather they are almost entirely on topics related to historical exegesis of Christian Scriptures. Yet Bailey’s choice not to engage with Islam can in no way be taken as an indication that what he writes is not, at least partially, applicable to if not directed at Muslims. Indeed, a good portion of what he has produced has been concerned to explain the Bible in a way Muslims can understand. Much of Cragg’s writing is ostensibly for

---

104 A number of audio and video tapes have been produced by various studios which feature Kenneth Bailey. Neither a list of these tapes nor a bibliography of his writings, have, to our
Christians. Yet in this, like Bailey, he anticipates that Muslims also will be in his reading audience. The major difference is that what Bailey does is within the Christian context of the Bible, while Cragg's approach is usually that of explaining Islam and the Qur'an to Christians (or Christianity to Muslims). By staying entirely within the Bible and Christian structures Bailey has avoided Muslim arguments against him which Cragg sometimes has suffered.

Bailey described a comparison of himself to Cragg as 'not like apples and oranges but more like apples and copper pipe'. Because we are comparing like with like in this chapter and because Bailey and Cragg set out to do quite different things in their respective writings, we do not undertake such a comparison. Nevertheless Bailey's biblical interpretation has been influenced by the Middle Eastern culture in which it has been developed and there are two significant aspects of his writing which have direct bearing on our later analysis of Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures.

3.6.1 Peasant culture

In seeking to understand New Testament passages and particularly the parables of Jesus, Bailey employed two methodologies for which he has become known. One was to analyse literary structures of the New Testament and thereby infer meaning which otherwise would be invisible without an understanding of those structures. While undoubtedly there are such

---

105 For instance in the introduction to *Emmaus Furlongs* Cragg writes, '...we take up outlines in Christianity for ourselves and, if they be so minded, for Muslims around us.'

106 From a personal interview in Nicosia, September 1994.
structures in Christian Scriptures, western scholarship has given mixed reviews to the weight Bailey places on them. Additionally, as this aspect of his writing does not have much applicability to our thesis, we do not take it up.

The second well-known feature of Bailey's writing is an in-depth cultural analysis particularly of the stories and the events of the New Testament. This includes the parables and historical events such as the birth of Jesus. Bailey has also developed significant cultural insights into some of the Pauline writing in the New Testament. We argue that his approach to Christian Scriptures actually provides a different type of common ground between Muslims and Christians from the one which Cragg seeks.

By not engaging with Islam, Bailey has a more understandable and, perhaps, a more consistent theological position. The obvious danger in such an approach is that it is not a theology in cross-reference which truly hears and meets the questions and issues from another side, in this case Islam which is the majority religion of the Middle East. This does not mean that Bailey's approach has no value to a theology in cross-reference. There are ways in which it offers an alternative to some of the hermeneutical gymnastics of Bible and the Qur'an which Cragg goes through in seeking to find a common ground between Muslim and Christian.

Our beginning point is Bailey's historical and cultural exegesis of the New Testament. We use his own words to describe the motivation for the development of his ideas.
It is impossible to communicate in writing the utter frustration I have endured as I have, across the years, read the works of very able Western scholars who time and time again have read into the text of the New Testament their own Western attitudes toward the above topics, with little or no apparent awareness that their own feelings and attitudes on these topics are not universals. A cat will act like a cat in Baghdad, Berlin, or Boston. But people do not respond to the issues of life in the same way, irrespective of their cultural heritage, language and historical experience. A good Bible dictionary offers straight-forward information for the culturally uninitiated. For instance Jesus' teaching in Mt. 7:1-6 refers to a plank and speck of sawdust (NIV) in the eyes of the protagonists. To understand the metaphor, one needs to know the way wood was cut. One man stood underneath a propped up piece of wood with another on top. Each pulled on his end of the saw. A likely occurrence was for the man underneath to get sawdust in his eye. The man on top could not help until he got down so the plank was no longer in his line of vision. The teaching comes alive when there is a clear understanding of how wood was cut.

Bailey's cultural analysis, however, is much more than this. He argues that cultural issues were extremely complex in Jesus' time. Much of the significance of New Testament teaching relies on cultural understanding. It spoke volumes to the hearers of the day but often essential elements of its message have been missed by interpreters in retrospect. In noting the complexity of the issues involved, in essence Bailey argues for the importance of a sociological or anthropological approach to understanding the New Testament.

To interpret the parables of Jesus, the interpreter (consciously or unconsciously) will inevitably make decisions about attitudes toward

---

women, men, the family, the family structure, family loyalties and their requirements, children, architectural styles, agricultural methods, leaders, scholars, religious authorities, trades, craftsmen, servants, eating habits, money, loyalty to community, styles of humor, story-telling, methods of communication, use of metaphor, forms of argumentation, forms of reconciliation, attitudes towards time, towards governmental authority, what shocks and at what level, reactions to social situations, reasons for anger, attitudes toward animals, emotional and cultural reactions to various colors, dress, sexual codes, the nature of personal and community honor and its importance, and many, many other things. 

From early in his missionary career Bailey's active, inquiring mind constantly sought to understand Middle Eastern cultural norms. He also quickly saw indications that aspects of New Testament interpretation were simply being missed because of lack of understanding of the culture.

Knowledge of the culture that informs the text of Gospel parables is crucial to a full understanding of them. The impact of such elements has, in the past, been discerned only partially. Significant elements of the cultural setting of the synoptic parables can be delineated more precisely through discussion with contemporary peasants, through minute examination of Oriental versions of the Gospels, and by a careful study of pertinent ancient literature. These three tools must be used in addition to the standard critical tools of scholarship.

Thus Bailey became an amateur anthropologist and applied his findings to New Testament interpretation. He has argued, persuasively, that present day peasant culture is largely the same today as it was in the time of Christ and indeed, well back into Old Testament times. This is borne out through the study of little known Oriental versions of the Gospels where one can see cultural interpretation which matches present-day peasant understanding. The same is true for other forms of ancient literature. Bailey goes to some pains to make this point in the introduction to Finding the Lost. 

Middle Eastern cultural patterns have millennia behind them and are extremely slow

---

108 Ibid., 32.
109 Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 43.
110 Bailey, Finding the Lost, 15-53.
to evolve. Thus, Bailey argues, much can be learned today about the stories in Christian Scriptures simply by paying careful attention to today’s Middle Eastern peasant culture. They are ignored at the peril of missing key points which were to be communicated by the story.

If Bailey’s argument is correct, the values, attitudes and methodologies of today’s peasant culture in the Middle East all existed prior to Christianity and Islam. This means there is a largely unidentified set of shared values which lies beneath the belief system of either religion. Following this line of thought, divisions in the society would occur more because there are shared values than because of deviation from those values. This argues for a wholly different approach to Christian-Muslim differences, one which is more anthropological or sociological than theological. Although his writings do not make this specific point, perhaps unwittingly Bailey has found a common ground between Christians and Muslims in the parables and stories of the New Testament. One indication that this is so is in the reception of his book God Is, which has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. It has also been the basis for a successful video production entitled ‘I Am’, which has been widely received by both Muslims and Christians in the Middle East. The video production was broadcast on national television in the Sudan, indicating its acceptance. In the book and the video Bailey used a traditional storytelling form of three characters consisting of a wise man, an earnest seeker and a fool. The content consisted of New Testament parables and stories. The stories, coming from the Bible, successfully transcended typical religious

111 Ibid., 29.
differences, drawing on the common peasant culture of the audience. The rationale for this approach is best explained in Bailey’s own words.

Jesus [was] a metaphorical theologian and . . . a participant in the intellectual life of his society. A further ‘lens’ that is critical for an understanding of any metaphorical theologian is the need for a clear perception of the culture of which he was a part. If theology is composed with philosophy as its base, then training in that philosophy is all that one needs to pursue that theology. But if theology is created by simile, metaphor, parable, and dramatic action, then the culture of the theologian and his/her people is a critical key for unlocking the theological intent of the metaphorical language.¹¹²

Thus as an amateur anthropologist Bailey found common ground between Christian and Muslim in the peasant culture housed in stories and events of New Testament teaching.

As well as finding that peasant culture gives understanding to existing Christian Scriptures, Bailey has used what he learned in Middle Eastern culture to study oral tradition and shed light on how these stories came to be. Middle Eastern peasant culture’s handling of oral communication gives information about the nature of our New Testament, according to Bailey. Bailey postulated a new category of oral tradition which he named informal controlled. (Already acknowledged categories were formal controlled and informal uncontrolled.) It is a form which, according to Bailey, fits many of the parables in the New Testament. On this basis, he has argued for a ‘higher’ view of the Synoptic tradition.¹¹³ He has also noted that knowing how stories are passed down gives important clues regarding what is significant in the

stories and what is not and what parts have been embellished versus what are verbatim reports or exact quotations from the person giving them.

Thus Middle Eastern peasant culture helps the interpreter to understand not just the cultural setting (and so the real meaning of the story) but also the oral tradition which eventually brought the story into writing. This aspect of Christian Scriptures is something Cragg misses. The whole concept of a particular culture, such as that of the Middle Eastern peasant, is not in the Qur'an, part of whose miracle is its lofty language and its purported universality. Cragg's theology in cross-reference has the strength that it fully takes the Qur'an into account, respectfully and to some degree as Scripture, as we noted in chapter 2. We later argue that Cragg has also taken on some Quranic views in his approach to Christian Scriptures. Bailey's approach provides a helpful balance.

3.6.2 The parables of Jesus and the nature of Christian Scriptures

Bailey has written extensively on the parables of Jesus. On the other hand, Cragg, though he quotes and deals broadly with Christian Scriptures, has very little on the parables. What he has written is related to those parables which demonstrate his particular theological position. For instance in The Privilege of Man 1968 (139-43), Cragg does exegesis on the parable of the Prodigal Son but it is in the context of illustrating his understanding of the nature of revelation involving 'risk' on the part of God and suffering (on the part of the father) which made redemption possible. Bailey took up Cragg's surmise of the cross
being present in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and began what he called a three-decade love affair with the parable.\textsuperscript{114} Bailey uses more of an inductive approach to Christian Scriptures. He begins with parts of Christian Scriptures which do not make sense to the Western scholar's mind and seeks cultural clues to understand them anew. Cragg is more deductive by using Christian Scriptures to explain a particular theological position.

Bailey also experimented with Gairdner's approach of communication through drama. His earliest book \textit{The Cross and the Prodigal} was first done in the form of a play which actually elicited village audience response. How should the father respond to the returning son?\textsuperscript{115} Christian Scriptures for Bailey are intrinsically linked to the common people. Cragg's theological approach is to the educated elite from where ideas can later filter down to the popular level. Yet by addressing only the theological mind, it would seem that Cragg has missed a valuable common ground in New Testament events and stories between Muslim and Christian which Bailey has found in his historical exegesis that utilises aspects of anthropology and sociology.

\subsection*{3.7 Lamin Sanneh and Kenneth Cragg}

Lamin Sanneh is introduced here only to make one particular point which he has developed in his book \textit{Encountering the West}. Gairdner, Zwemer, Smith, Cragg and Bailey all spent a significant portion of their lives as missionaries. Lamin Sanneh has not, coming from a host culture to Western missionaries.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{114} Bailey, \textit{Finding the Lost}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{115} Bailey, \textit{Cross and the Prodigal}.
\end{footnotesize}
This point is critical to his qualifications for cultural analysis. In his book Sanneh deals with Western culture as well as with the positive contributions and negative impact of cultural imperialism by missionaries. He takes issue, however, with the common perception of today that missionaries, obsessed with their understanding of truth and lacking anthropological awareness, have undermined indigenous cultures in their efforts to bring Christianity to the world. Sanneh does not defend missionaries. Rather he offers another analysis.

Sanneh begins his study with a thoughtful examination of the development of religious thought in the West. He writes of the Enlightenment, Romantic and Modern cultures, the last of which has now come generally to be seen as an alternative to religion, sometimes expressing itself in the form of Nationalism. For example, it is patriotic to die for one's country but the act of the fanatic to die for one's religion. The post-Enlightenment, post-modernist mindset of the West has set itself up as its own religion, Sanneh argues.

After giving an analysis of culture in the West, Sanneh goes into the development of Christianity in Africa. Sanneh is persuasive that missionary work which related to 'mother tongue' translation of Scripture accomplished something far beyond what the missionaries themselves or their supporters or critics might ever have imagined. Endowing every linguistic and cultural group in the world with the ability to have in its own linguistic and cultural 'revelation' unleashed a tremendous cultural power. 'Whether or not they
intended it, therefore, missionary translators gave consecrated value to the vernacular by investing it with a Scriptural tradition.\footnote{\citet{Sanneh1978}, 78.}

Christianity is a translated religion. Jesus' teachings were in Aramaic and yet they come to us in Greek in our New Testament.\footnote{Ibid., 134.} Unlike the Qur’an, which is not to be translated but can only be interpreted, Christian belief is that the gospel is for every culture and language.\footnote{Ibid., 120.} Sanneh further makes the now common point that the gospel can only be communicated through cultural forms (language being chief among them). There is no such thing as a pristine or pure culture.\footnote{Ibid., 117.} Rather cultures are constantly interacting and changing. He moved from this now commonly accepted assumption to claim that missionaries' concentration on a language and translation of Scripture empowered rather than weakened cultures because it gave them revelation which they could interpret themselves. These indigenous language projects have enabled pre-modern cultures to interact with and face the modern world and develop their own way of understanding not just Scriptures, but themselves.

This in turn has fostered a non-elitist approach to faith.

Two general ideas growing out of the vernacular translation ferment and having considerable impact on Africans may be identified here. One was how the Christian religion, or at any rate its Protestant forms, separated itself from the need to employ special professional language, especially any arcane, elitist form reserved for religion and excluded from the mundane, workaday world. Secondly, ordinary Africans, including women, came to

\footnotetext{116}{Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 78.}
\footnotetext{117}{Ibid., 134.}
\footnotetext{118}{Ibid., 120.}
\footnotetext{119}{Ibid., 117.}
perceive that in principle they suffered no stigma of a ritual or cultural nature that prevented them from participating in the religious life.\textsuperscript{120}

Sanneh suggests that Christianity is today growing in the two-thirds world, at a time when there is a decline in the West, because revelation (Scripture) was translated into those cultures. He believes this was because Scripture was received but at the same time post-Enlightenment philosophy could often be screened out because these ‘mother tongue’ cultures could interpret this revelation for themselves within their own framework of understanding.

The problem posed by the modernist rejection of God is at heart a cultural problem. . . . It is easy to forget. . . the role Christianity played in ridding the medieval West of its fatalist, determinist attitude towards nature. . . . Given this cultural amnesia, the West seems unable to understand the double role Christianity might play in Africa or elsewhere, on the one hand by speaking to traditional spiritual and intellectual needs, and on the other by furnishing people with the equipment needed to comprehend unprecedented change, just as the religion did in Europe.\textsuperscript{121}

Sanneh would also be in comfortable agreement with the position that biblical hermeneutics is a global task for all the Christians of the world. It is impossible for people to divorce themselves from their cultures and produce a Christianity that is culture-free. God came through a particular culture and meets Christians in their particular cultures. The best way to guard against cultural imperialism in Christianity is not so much working to remove culture from interpretation of Scripture as it is to ensure that all cultures can interpret Scripture to develop a Christian world hermeneutic.

There are two points of significance from Sanneh’s perspective for our study of Cragg. First, Sanneh’s emphasis on Christian Scriptures as revelation is quite

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 76.
different from Cragg's emphasis on revelation being housed in Christ as written in Scriptures. Thus Christian Scriptures play a more pivotal role in Sanneh's theological approach than they do in Cragg's.

Secondly, translation for Sanneh means giving Christian Scriptures to everyone, even the simplest. Sanneh would probably agree with Cragg on the necessity of revelation being interactive. Like Cragg the relationship of language and revelation is also important for Sanneh. Unlike Cragg, however, language's role is to make revelation common, empowering the poor and dispossessed, like the women in a society which has traditionally suppressed women. Interestingly, Sanneh would argue what many have found, i.e., that pre-modern cultures often have particular interest in the Old Testament and God's special treatment of a people. This is something to which they can relate. These cultures seem well able to make the shift from a particular people to the universal back to a particular people (themselves). Cragg largely interprets the Old Testament as an expression of unnecessary ethnicity and he struggles with its Jewishness given the political conflicts in the Middle East since the end of World War II.

In conclusion Sanneh summarises in one place that 'The Enlightenment view was that cultural differences conceal and thus distort the truth of one humanity.'\textsuperscript{122} This is a basic presupposition of Cragg's approach and one that we too have linked to modernity. Sanneh, however, offers a different paradigm for understanding the nature of Christian Scriptures, their

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 172-3.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 112-3.
translation, and consequently, revelation. Further analysis of this is taken up later in the thesis when Cragg’s approach to Christian Scriptures is further developed.
4. Cragg’s Approach to Christian Scriptures

Inconsistencies are present in Cragg’s writings, as they are with anyone. This is particularly noticeable when they are scrutinised through the lens of a discipline which is not Cragg’s primary strength, that is, biblical studies. While this chapter suggests that there are problems with his views, we in no way wish to imply a lack of appreciation for the overall contribution Cragg has to make in the area of theology in cross-reference (Christ and the Faiths 1986). By coming from a Christian faith position, yet coming not as a biblical scholar or exegete, Cragg leads his readers to many fruitful areas of exploration. His immense personal integrity displays his openness to having his faith challenged by Islam. This, along with his knowledge gleaned from wide reading and his pastoral heart, combine to expand the thoughtful reader’s horizons of understanding. Cragg’s cross-disciplinary approach does have something to offer in a world of increasing academic specialisation.

This chapter is a brief overview of Cragg’s doctrinal model of Christian Scriptures. Although almost all of Cragg’s writings at least quote Christian Scriptures, and some like To Meet and to Greet (1992) contain brief summary treatments of Christian scriptural issues, there are four major works which deal with either critical or doctrinal concerns in a more systematic way. These are Jesus and the Muslim 1985, The Christ and the Faiths 1986, What Decided Christianity 1989, and The Lively Credentials of God 1995. Cragg himself has recognised in these books the development of his understanding of Christian
Scriptures.\textsuperscript{1} To quote him: ‘Jesus and the Muslim (1985) and What Decided Christianity (1989) represented my own effort to accept the obvious . . . liabilities of Christian scholarship about Christian faith’ (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 216).

Each of the above four books has a different purpose or intended audience. In Jesus and the Muslim (1985) Cragg has a chapter on the Bible in the context of presenting issues of the Christian faith, particularly the person of Jesus, in a way that a lay Muslim reader is supposed to understand. It is questionable whether this end is actually achieved given the specific (and thus exclusive) theological language Cragg uses. Like most of Cragg’s writings, in reality it is probably more useful for the thoughtful Christian living in a Muslim milieu.

The Christ and the Faiths (1986) is a work in comparative theology directed more towards the traditional, believing Christian whom Cragg wishes to challenge to engage in a theology in cross-reference. ‘Theology in cross-reference is the only theology there is. There is no good faith that is not attentive, no fiducia not set to merit its welcome’ (emphasis original; Christ and the Faiths 1986, 344).

What Decided Christianity (1989) was written in direct response to a general challenge from John Bowden. In his Note to the Second Impression Bowden writes, ‘I have yet to come across a criticism of any substance from those with

\textsuperscript{1} Cragg stated that ‘the one chapter’ in The Christ and the Faiths contained a systematic statement of his position on Christian Scriptures. He also commented that his soon to be published The Lively Credentials of God had material useful for this topic (personal interview, Oxford, 15 July, 1995).
more “orthodox” views, in print or otherwise. Cragg took up that challenge (see 1.4). Finally, in The Lively Credentials of God (1995), Cragg deals with Christian Scriptures, particularly in his chapter ‘Enscriptured’. This covers the nature and formation of the New Testament canon.

It is worth noting that what Cragg calls ‘Bible studies’ (see Ch. 8) all pre-date the above four books. Thus his exegesis (see Ch. 8) is almost all before he actually had grappled overtly with doctrinal issues of Christian Scriptures in his writing. Also, except for Jesus and the Muslim (1985), Cragg’s writings which critically deal with Christian Scriptures are part of his later work which, we have noted, makes a noticeable theological shift from earlier writing. Indeed, in keeping with this understanding, Jesus and the Muslim contains a more traditional theological view of Christian Scriptures than the other three. That could be because it was simplified as an explanation for a Muslim audience.

On the other hand this is but one example of several we document below, that even though it was only a year before his Christ and the Faiths (1986), the latter and writing following it, present a different, developing view of Christian Scriptures. Jesus and the Muslim is more traditional than what follows.

Although there is some overlap, each of the above four books treats the subject slightly differently. In them Cragg does not present a systematically developed doctrine of Christian Scriptures. In none of them is the subject of Christian Scriptures his central theme. Nevertheless there is a theological perspective to Christian Scriptures and it is this which we seek to analyse.

---

2 Bowden, Jesus: The Unanswered Questions, xxiii.
4.1 Scripture or Scriptures?

One feature, which appears minor at first glance, is the singular-plural difference between 'Scripture' and 'Scriptures'. Cragg uses both. Is this a simple oversight or is there significance according to the context? In *What Decided Christianity* and *Jesus and the Muslim* Cragg uses both but more commonly refers to Christian 'Scriptures'. This holds true for most of Cragg's other writings. However, in *The Christ and the Faiths* the word is used mostly in the singular, 'Scripture'. It is also significantly used in the singular in *The Lively Credentials of God*. It seems Cragg generally uses the singular when writing about the actual doctrine of Christian Scriptures, rather than just referring to them in passing (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 315-34; *Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 108-27).

We considered whether in *The Christ and the Faiths* this usage could be explained by other than intrinsically theological considerations. For instance, does he use the plural to distinguish between the 'Scriptures and cultures of mankind' (p. 336) versus the Scripture for each faith? It seems not, as he uses the plural in referring to the 'Hebrew Scriptures' of the Jews (pp. 12, 121, 123, 165). He almost altogether avoids using the word 'Scripture(s)' for Hindu or Buddhist religious writings, referring only to the specific texts. But as might be expected, with Islam Cragg uses Scripture in the singular (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 61).

---

3 See for example, *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985), 54, 69, 73, 75, 86,133; *What Decided Christianity* (1989), 75, 86, 115. Interestingly, when he does use the singular it is theologically and in both books in the context of the canon (pp. 141 and 115-6 respectively).
Similarly, we checked to see if the singular 'Scripture' might be linked to Cragg's engagement with the Qur'an. The Qur'an can only be understood as a singular 'Scripture.' Also, Quranic references to books given to the other Prophets (e.g. Moses, the Tawrah; Jesus, the Injîl) are in the singular as well. Cragg does not appear to have made a simple accommodation to Islam. In Jesus and the Muslim, when he writes for a Muslim audience explaining Christian Scriptures, he uses the plural to help explain the different types of books in the New Testament, such as the Epistles and the Gospels (pp. 90-111).

The topic of 'Scripture' or 'Scriptures' is a potentially large one. There are good arguments for using either when referring to the Bible. 'Scripture' can be used to indicate recognition of a theological unity to the Bible, something Cragg generally accepts in the New Testament. The plural 'Scriptures', on the other hand, can be used to indicate a diversity in the type of writings or purposes of the various books in the Bible. The Jews referred to their 'Scriptures', e.g., the Torah, Prophets, Psalms. It has only been relatively recently that Christians have begun to use the singular for Scriptures, arguably for theological reasons.

To 'read in the Scriptures' (Matthew 21:42) seems perhaps a more common Christian phrase from the New Testament times on for several centuries if not until relatively recently, than to 'read in Scripture'.

What we see here is a long process in which 'the Scriptures' used to designate a plurality of Biblical books or passages . . . whose content was the significant point, whereas later with Protestant bibliolatry developing one finds increasingly the singular 'scripture', designating the book itself as a specific entity, which as a single bound volume became a central religious symbol.

We use the plural, Christian Scriptures, in this thesis primarily to indicate that an understanding of different models for Christian Scriptures is a useful tool.

---

to its interpretation. John Goldingay explains the significance of a ‘model’. This is the definition we use.

Doctrinal thinking commonly involves the use of models. The task of doctrine is to aid our understanding of key realities of Christian faith such as God, salvation, the church, and the Bible. Many of these realities are by their very nature formidably deep or complex. A model is an image or construct that helps us grasp aspects of these realities by providing us with something we can understand that has points of comparison with the object we wish to understand, thus helping us get our mind round its nature.

Cragg’s use of the singular when he deals theologically with Christian Scriptures in *The Christ and the Faiths* and *The Lively Credentials of God* seems to reflect at least an implicit theological position. His usage indicates that he accepts, seemingly uncritically, that the doctrine of Christian Scripture constitutes a particular kind of unity which can be termed ‘Scripture’. He interprets this unity through the form of a single model (developed later in this chapter). By seeing Christian Scriptures through the lens of a single, traditional model Cragg runs into various, often unrecognised theological difficulties. For instance, he objects to the consequences of a Christian ‘Scripture’ (singular) because parts of that Scripture are clearly inadequate for the hospitality to all portrayed in the Epistles.

[The Christian will] . . . is served by its Scripture in terms of a very limited part of [the world] . . . . The question . . . is what we are to do, in the will to universality, with the severe geographical limitation of the New Testament and the closed-ness of the Canon. . . . [They] are the only ones scripturized, canonized and authorized as ‘sufficient’. Clearly culturally they are painfully insufficient (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 328).

---

In *The Christ and the Faiths* Cragg lists the problems with the canon of Christian Scripture as the fourth of five 'honesties' Christians must develop if they are truly to engage in theology of cross-reference (pp. 328–338).

Cragg deals with the issue in much the same way in *What Decided Christianity*, where he refers to a 'biblical faith' and 'New Testament Church' rather than 'Scripture' but with the same essential thrust.

Then rapidly [biblical faith] begins to focus on particular man, tribal man. Here lay its greatest demerit the correction of which was to be the travail and, as we will see, the achievement, of the Christhood of Jesus in the shape of the New Testament Church. That correction was the liberation out of ethnic and covenantal priority, into inclusively human openness, of the Messianic reality (*What Decided Christianity* 1989, 53–4).

In *The Lively Credentials of God*, his latest book dealing with the subject, the problem is still very much an issue for him.

The question is sometimes asked whether an on-going faith is well served by a confined Scripture, especially given . . . the cultural particularity circumscribing it. Indeed, the idea and fact of 'the canon' might be said to be a circumscribing (literally) of faith itself. If, today, we submit to the canon — we have no other option ecclesiastically — we need to do so with some register of inner protest (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 125).

There is a consistent intentionality on Cragg's part when he uses the singular 'Scripture' in referring to a theological understanding of the Bible. Although Cragg may call Christians to 'honesty' about their Scripture it does seem he has tacitly accepted that a Protestant bibliolatry, such as Smith refers to, is *the* Christian position for Christian Scriptures. Cragg has a relatively high view of the New Testament, as we shall see later, but his theological model seems to be one that easily leads to inconsistencies as he grapples with his own

---

7 *What is Scripture?* 14.
Christian faith in a plural world. Goldingay notes that ‘Old models [of Christian Scriptures] are in difficulty partly because they were stretched to provide answers to different and broader questions than the ones they originally addressed.’ This seems to be the case for Cragg as he is challenged in his inter-faith concerns. Parts of Christian Scriptures that do not fit his model are either overtly dropped or unwittingly ignored in his writings.

The way Cragg uses the singular ‘Scripture’ in his theological writing on Christian Scriptures, we argue, is one indication that he has developed inadequate models for Christian Scriptures that would be consistent with his own theological framework which has a high view of those Scriptures. The question needs to be asked of Cragg, Does the ethnic exclusivity portrayed in much of the Old Testament and in parts of the New Testament need to be a problem in the way he perceives it to be? Are there other ways of approaching Christian Scriptures which enable us still to maintain a high view of them, as Cragg does at least for the New Testament, without essentially needing to disregard parts of them as he does? We respond to these and other difficulties in this and the following three chapters.

4.2 Canon of Christian Scriptures

For Cragg the subject of the canon of Christian Scriptures is overshadowed by the concern that Scripture is ‘culturally ... painfully insufficient (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 328). To further clarify: ‘A gospel that intends the world draws

---

8 Ibid., 13.
its articulation only from the Mediterranean’ (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 328).

According to Cragg, Christians are living in an ever shrinking, plural world, where increasingly the only kind of legitimate theology, is a theology in cross-reference. This is a problem for Christians whose faith is based on the Bible.

The will to find textual biblical guidance in reckoning with pluralism as we now face it is complicated by the limits Holy Scripture exhibits in its geographical, cultural and ethnic range. ...Henry Martyn in nineteenth-century India was right to query, fruitlessly, ‘what Paul would do in my condition’. Paul’s beloved letters gave Martyn no answer (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 145).

The task of theology in cross-reference has been put in jeopardy for Christians by parts of their very own Scriptures. Thus, believes Cragg, blind biblical loyalty very easily can take the Christian away from this vital task of theology in cross-reference. ‘We are asking whether Christian thought — and, no less important, devotion — have failed, in their biblical loyalties, to “belong with mankind”’ (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 329). We examine Cragg’s view of canon in terms of internal consistency and the plural context of today’s world to see how far that contributes to his theological difficulties.

Basically, Cragg’s understanding of the canon and the process of its formation is close to one that has commonly been accepted by the Protestant Christian church, at least within the last two centuries, and, relatively speaking, is quite traditional. Goldingay describes the three stages typical of this view.

First, there are ‘traditions’ or ‘writings,’ inspired and religiously significant but not mandatorily authoritative. ... Second, there are ‘scriptures,’ with the idea of normativeness implied by that word. ... Third, a gradually increasing collection of scriptures may become a defined ‘canon,’ a definitively closed and exclusive list of normative writings that comes into being through an act of canonization. By this act what has already been established preeminence as scripture and thus de facto recognition receives official ratification. The act of canonization does not give authority but does restrict authority.⁹

⁹ Emphasis original; ibid., 102-3.
Goldingay also points out that a traditional view of canon formation 'draws attention to the way in which scriptures become scripture.'\(^\text{10}\) While this is a clear, understandable position it is but an easy step from this to a single model of interpretation of that Scripture. To a degree this has happened with Cragg, particularly in his earliest treatment on the subject in *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985). His later writings contain a modified and slightly broader view.

Cragg takes an orthodox position regarding the reasons for the emergence of a canon. Part of the formal impetus towards a written canon was to guard against creeping heresy (*Jesus and the Muslim* 1985, 115-6). One test against such heresy was authorship. "Apostolicity" need not rigorously require penmanship but rather dependable attribution to one of the apostles or their close associates (*Jesus and the Muslim* 1985, 116). Here Cragg relates it to the Muslim reader by likening it to the way in which reliability is reckoned in Islamic religious writings. 'Muslims familiar with the prerequisites of authentic *isnād* [chain of transmission] in Tradition will readily recognise what was meant' (*Jesus and the Muslim* 1985, 116).

In Cragg’s later writings he clearly does not associate Apostolicity with *isnād*. This is either a simple explanation for Muslims or an indication of how his understanding of authorship in the New Testament later develops. As a theological model there are problems with it. This idea of a chain of authority gives the impression of a much firmer, clearer process than what actually took

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 103.
place. The emphasis focused on the writer, rather than the content. In Islam it is the chain of authority rather than the content which validates a hadith.

Cragg makes a second, fairly standard point about the developing canon. 'The Church was heir to the Hebraic practice of “lections”, or qeryana, in public worship, and this undoubtedly contributed strongly to the concept of a Christian canon' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 126). Or, 'When Christian writings . . . began to circulate in the churches and to be read in public worship . . . it was natural to associate the practice with synagogue lectionary habits and so, in turn, to develop the idea of a Christian canon' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 330). As we later note, the Qur'an, too is read in public worship (see 4.3).

Thirdly, Cragg uses fairly standard information about the timetable for the Christian canon.

The basic list had taken shape by the middle of the second century of the Church, as we know from references, for example, in the second Letter of Clement and in Justin Martyr. It is fair to say that there was a canon in being by around 190 though, for two centuries after, a very few books (Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude) were sometimes ‘in’ and sometimes ‘out’ of local lists. Athanasius of Alexandria, in 367, lists all the titles known now in the Muratorian or western canon. A papal declaration confirmed them in 405. The Nestorian Church contented itself with 22 Books, excluding 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation, but including Hebrews. The Syrian Church had Tatian's Diatessaron, or inter-weaving of the Four Gospels, known in Syriac translation as the Peshitta (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 126).

Cragg notes that 'it is important to see that “canonising” does not confer authority on the text. It acknowledges authority already present...' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 126). But it is at this point Cragg has another difficulty. The fact that canonisation happened so early in the life of the church is a problem for him. Christian Scriptures were 'finalised within a
highly partial phase of [the church’s] universal history’ (Christ and the Faiths
1986, 329).

The canon leaves us asking whether the Church should ever have finalised its written criteria so early and so confidently. The question is especially urgent in respect of what is read in worship. Should the treasures of subsequent Christian wisdom, devotion and spiritual enterprise have been so rigorously excluded from canonical status? (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 126).

This is an unusual position. Given the divisions in the church, surely common sense would argue that more divisive dogma and creeds almost certainly would have become a part of definitive canon had the process come together later, perhaps to the extent of there being markedly different Bibles for different parts of the church. This would have the opposite effect to the one Cragg desires, of narrowing further the ability of the church to have a mission to the world.

Fourthly, well in keeping with tradition, Cragg does not question the fact that the canon of Christian Scriptures is closed and needs to remain so. But in his understanding of the nature of this canon and its formulation he has a dilemma. The canon appears to not include large parts of the world as we know it today.

[Canon and its formation] have every right to be definitive. For they, and their Hebraic dimension, were the matrix of all things messianic — the long hope, the Jesus-form and the open Christ-people. It would be crass thinking and a hopeless proceeding to suggest that the Canon might now be reopened (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 336).

Canon is the child of process, not the matrix. This quote demonstrates the crux of Cragg’s theological difficulty in his view of the canon. By seeing the canon in a traditional way, yet at the same time being challenged by his inter-faith
concerns, Cragg faces a dilemma. As we quoted above 'The idea and fact of “the canon” might be said to be a circumscribing (literally) of faith itself. If, today, we submit to the canon — we have no other option ecclesiastically — we need to do so with some register of inner protest' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 125).

Despair might well ask what explicit counsel the scriptures can afford us now. Hebraic notions of ‘the Gentiles’ will not suffice, for they impugn God’s equal grace. The New Testament, incorporating Jews and Gentiles in ‘one communion and fellowship’, does not tell us how to do so when ‘the Gentiles’ live by the dharma or prostrate themselves in the mosque. There are no letters of Paul to the Meccans, no ‘acts of modern apostles’ canonized as ‘holy writ’.

This limitation of our canonical frame of reference has to be taken seriously and is not made good by isolated quotation, whether ‘exclusivist’ or ‘inclusivist’ (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 145).

We argue that at least part of Cragg’s difficulty is that his presentation of the overall process of the formation of the canon of Christian Scriptures is more concrete than it needs to be given his theological frame of reference. Noting his explanation from Jesus and the Muslim it is clear that at least some of the influence for this more cut and dried approach can be attributed to Islam. It is possible that Cragg merely seeks to use categories Muslims understand. Even if this is so, nevertheless, these categories have helped to shape Cragg’s doctrine of Scripture. Although Cragg’s theological instincts in a plural world lead him in one direction, his understanding of the canonical process holds him back. This has consequences in his theology.

Goldingay notes that by overemphasising a canonical process that may have been relatively subordinate in terms of importance in the life of the church it ‘unwittingly implies that the Jewish scriptures were never a canon, because those scriptures were never a closed and exclusive authority for either Jews or
This is certainly true for Cragg and is demonstrated in his struggles with the Old Testament. 'But should [Hebraic scriptures] have been allowed to ride uncritically with future calling? To be historically formative is one thing: to be truly future-oriented is another' (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 330). Cragg has commented that it would be more profitable to read Donne's poetry than many Old Testament narratives. For instance

The episode of Samuel and Agag is horrific; the wanderings of the Ark, and sundries in royal chronicles, are trivial or inconsequential. They have their fascination for historians but should they monopolize the ground of Scripture to the degree they do (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 332).

But Old Testament narratives cannot be compared to Donne's poetry. They serve very different functions. His view of a relatively concrete canonical process has the result of implicitly subjugating the Old Testament. Cragg objects to the way the Old Testament is used as Scripture by some Christians.

There have been occasions, almost bizarre in their paradoxical character, of 'Bible-Christians' enthusiastically upholding all things Israeli, in line, as they saw it, with the Bible's unity, despite the secular realism of the State, and despite the witness of the New Testament to the equal status of all peoples, under grace (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 334).

Neither Jesus nor Paul rejected Old Testament scriptures because they were interpreted more narrowly by those who disagreed with them and thus rejected the gospel message they were preaching. Given his acceptance of the New Testament, this can be argued as an inconsistency in Cragg.

There is another implication of Cragg's view of canon. Although he shies well away from a rigid view of Christian Scriptures, there is a sense in which Cragg accepts that interpretation today is restricted to rendering explicit what was

---

11 Ibid., 105.
earlier implicit, a logical outcome for those who see the canonical process in this way. This has the effect of unnecessarily narrowing the range of possible interpretation, depending on how one understands what is implicit. While Cragg himself fights this tendency, his view of canonical process helps to create this dilemma for him. ‘It may be claimed that all the essential work of Christian theology is latent, if not achieved, within [the New Testament]’ (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 112). Further, for Cragg, formation of the New Testament as canon signifies ‘acceptance within the Church as forming a body of Scripture to which reference can be made for authenticity of doctrine’ (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 115). When the understanding of Christian Scriptures is, even unwittingly, tied to such a single definitive view for ‘doctrine’, there are difficulties. If we accept Goldingay’s premise above that doctrinal thinking involves the use of models, Cragg’s view of canon and its purpose more or less locks him into a single such model (developed later in this chapter). This has the effect of creating a problem with Christian Scriptures for Cragg, which he seeks to solve in some unusual ways. Part of the solution is a practical rejection of those parts of Christian Scriptures which do not fit his model.

It seems sadly right to conclude that within the Bible the earlier Scriptures proceed in general from a quite different understanding of peoplehood than the later Scriptures. Whereas the Church achieved, albeit precariously, a definition of peoplehood quite contrasted in its non-ethnic, non-territorial character, it still continued loyally to nourish its piety and frame its worship in the language inherited from Moses, Samuel and David (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 332).

In essence what Cragg does is to develop a canon within a canon. Much of the Old Testament and even parts of the New are either implicitly rejected or ignored. Below we will argue for utilising different models for Christian

---

Scriptures, rather than breaking off or idiosyncratically interpreting bits which do not fit a single model as Cragg does.

The second way Cragg solves his theological dilemma is to move beyond Christian Scriptures.

The New Testament writers, within the Canon, were totally oblivious of Asia. The Islamic shape of mind about divine omnipotence was then still six centuries away. . . . We can only be scriptural in our world cross-reference by our own resources and our own responsibility in the Holy Spirit.

. . . . Maybe the assumption which bound the whole Bible into one, supposedly harmonious, supposedly sufficient, volume, was premature. . . . [Thus] today's Church has to be more widely, more ambitiously apostolic than the first apostles. (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 22-3).

In later writing Cragg expresses the point similarly by noting that 'we need the utmost rigour and imagination in possessing the New Testament' (Emphasis mine; *Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 108). Given this perspective, it is not surprising Cragg's writings contain challenging but often times unusual interpretations of Christian Scriptures. These we demonstrate in the following three chapters after we consider Cragg's model for Christian Scriptures.

In summary, for Cragg, the problem with the canon of Christian Scriptures is that it is locked in a space and time for far too narrow a segment of the world's population which it claims to reach. In this section we have argued that Cragg's view of the unity of the Bible is at least partially derived from his quite traditional view of the canonical process. This provides the basis for Cragg's single model approach to Scripture, which in turn creates the need for him essentially to disregard parts of Scripture that do not answer his concern for
Christian integrity in a plural world or to use his imagination for unusual interpretation in and beyond Christian Scriptures.

While Cragg squarely faces this problem of limited scriptures, he does not attempt to solve the dilemma of 'narrow scriptures' within a theology of Christian Scriptures. In other words, he does not attempt to come to a different understanding of Christian Scriptures in a way that would match his concerns. Cragg's instincts lead him rightly. Doing theology in cross-reference is absolutely vital in today's 'global village'. Few have engaged with another religion in the same depth or personal integrity as has Kenneth Cragg. Yet his rather rigid view of canonical process and what that means for today's Church is actually a brittle (breakable) view. Inconsistencies in Cragg do not merely create cracks in his theological framework for the canon of Christian Scripture. Cracks can be overlooked or cosmetic repairs can be done to them. Rather these inconsistencies have a shattering effect on the brittle structure; so much so that parts of Scripture are broken off and left lying by the wayside in Cragg's faith journey towards an honest Christian faith in a plural world.

4.3 Translation

In Pakistan it has become traditional for various groups to hold special Qur'an reading sessions on the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. For that celebration in February 1979 the History Department

13 In the late 1970's the birthday of Muhammad came to be a more emphasised celebration in Pakistan than had been the case previously. The present author grew up in Pakistan and then lived there from 1977–1980 and again 1984–1986. He was in the History Department of the University of the Punjab, 1978–80.
of University of the Punjab held a ‘Sirah Conference’. In the Department library study tables were moved to one side and white sheets were spread on the floor in the middle. As students and staff entered shoes were removed and all sat around the edges of the sheets in a large circle. Virtually the whole department attended, even though it was an official holiday. Incense was lit and in the centre was placed an edition of the Qur’an which was printed especially for such an event as this. There were fifty separately bound portions which together made an entire Qur’an.

The atmosphere was informal and, once begun, everybody took a portion of the Qur’an and in the traditional manner of rocking back and forth as if riding on a camel, began to read aloud. Some read faster than others, and when one was finished, they placed the portion in a separate pile and took an unread booklet. When no more portions were left, readers who had finished helped out neighbours by reading aloud one of the two pages that was open in that particular portion, thereby further reducing the reading time. When the entire Qur’an had been read there were speeches by two Lecturers who were known for their orthodox religious beliefs. The conference ended in a verbal extemporaneous prayer by one of the Lecturers and then a distribution of sweets to all participants.

Not more than half a dozen understood the Arabic. Had they understood, any individual reading would have been confused by the sound of others’ simultaneous reading. In the first sermon following the reading the Lecturer explained that the purpose was not to read the Qur’an as a textbook to be
studied. It was not the meaning so much as the blessing through the sound of the words that was the value of the exercise. Secondly, in the prayer there was a request from God for forgiveness for any mispronunciations in the reading aloud of the Holy Qur’an. No other pleas for forgiveness were made.

The above is a description of one popular expression of a Muslim doctrine of the Qur’an. This type of expression is not unusual, as Cragg notes. ‘The Qur’an is for recital rather than mere perusal, so that its sequences, refrains, strophes and accents have this in view rather than a studied logic’ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 7). Even though Quranic translation is more common today, there is still both a theological and a popular perspective which rejects that translation.

What we have described is not as foreign to Christianity (or Judaism) as it might seem at first. Until just a few years ago Mass in the Roman Catholic church was conducted in Latin, a language incompressible to most attendees. Scriptures are still read in Hebrew in Jewish Synagogues. Worship in the ancient churches continues to take place in the ancient languages. Cragg notes a similar phenomenon in Middle Eastern churches.

Worship was the last haven of the old tongues, but as Arabic came to dominate in daily life and society, the liturgical Aramaic, Coptic, Syriac, and Greek needed verbal interpretation for the comprehension of the worshipers. Arabic expositions educated the faithful but left the faith enshrined in its sacred languages (Arab Christian 1991, 283).

Services in Greek Orthodoxy are not understood by the rank and file of its adherents. It was only in 1994 that the Archbishop of Cyprus gave his approval for the use of the New Testament in a parallel version which has both modern
and ancient Greek. In Anglophone Protestantism there are groups who still cling to the antiquated language of the Authorised Version, undeterred by advances in textual scholarship and the difficulties which arise from archaic English usage. The list goes on. Any analysis of the effect Cragg’s engagement with Islam might have on his understanding of translation of Christian Scriptures must bear in mind the almost universal protective human inclination to keep what is sacred as lofty and apart. Cragg notes that this should not be the case for the New Testament. ‘Scripture was not in any necessarily sacred language. . . . The New Testament would happily be as cosmopolitan as readers might require’ (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 112).

There is a progression from early to later in Cragg’s understanding of translation. His earliest perspective is more utilitarian and surprisingly propositional. It fits well with Lamb’s thesis that Cragg has a mission to Islam and that it is a call to retrieval.¹⁴

The amazing reality behind and within the Christian mission in the world is this task of interpretation. Our duty is to carry over the Word that God has uttered, to be the translators of His speech into the language, the idiom, and the minds of ordinary men (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 273).

Later writing demonstrates both a widening and a narrowing of this perspective. In introductory comments to his translation of parts of the Qur’ân in Readings in the Qur’ân (1988), Cragg gives a wider perspective.

In any context language has to be seen, not as a coding device but as a communicative event. The translator serves a mediation where meaning cannot be taken from the one language except in a partaking by another. It cannot be an exercise in neutrality but requires a reciprocal relation for which idiom and vocabulary are never merely passive but active factors in a living exchange. Faiths have to be — to a degree — in communion, if their Scriptures are for translation. There are many instances in which the

¹⁴Lamb, Call to Retrieval, 107-114.
English Bible of the 17th century remints in the taking the wealth of the original Hebrew (*Readings in the Qur’an* 1988, 52-3).

In one of Cragg’s most recent writings, he recognises that at their very heart the nature of Christian Scriptures is that they are translated.

We do not have [the very words of Jesus] ... for Jesus did not speak English or dictate the *Good News* version. His Aramaic sounds and syllables are translated for us and have come ... through hazardous processes to reach the Greek Testament and ourselves beyond it (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 116).

This is reminiscent of Lamin Sanneh’s view that Christianity in its very nature is a translated religion. During the forty intervening years between Cragg’s earliest and latest writings, however, there is a theological development which for Cragg actually narrows how Christian Scriptures can be translated. We note several points.

First, in at least one instance, Cragg makes more of the Hebrew-Greek difference than perhaps he should. In *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985) Cragg explains to the Muslim layman that the different languages of Hebrew and Greek carried their own culture and mentality. Thus in Christian Scripture there was an inherent translation which consisted of a kind of interaction between the two languages.

Though the Hebrew and the Greek were deeply interpenetrating — as the great Septuaqint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, signifies — they had widely differing vocabularies and the mentalities so housed. Thus the Christian Scripture ‘translates’ or ‘intervenes’ between two realms of language ... (*Jesus and the Muslim* 1985, 78).

There are two problems with this, one textual and the other sociological. Almost two decades before Cragg’s writing the above, James Barr had argued persuasively that Hebrew-Greek cultural differences have been greatly
exaggerated and have consequently been a misleading suppositional base for interpretation of Christian scriptures. Barr argues that it is a modern problem rather than an ancient one. To illustrate, he points out it was only in the Victorian era that Matthew Arnold was asserting that 'the preponderance of power lay with Hebraism' whereas more recently the assumption is that it lies with the Greeks. Thus Barr argues 'The function of the contrast has not been the description of the ancient world but the analysis of different elements within modern culture.' He further goes on to state that what differences there may be cannot be attached to issues of language. For this and other reasons Barr refused to accept the arguments of Hebrew-Greek cultural distinctiveness which were common at the time he was writing.

This statement of Cragg's also seems inconsistent with his own understanding of translation (quoted above) which presupposes a 'reciprocal relation' between 'idiom and vocabulary' which are 'active factors in a living exchange' (Pen and the Faith 1985, 52). To over-emphasise the differences is to deny this point.

In later writing Cragg touches on the subject again. 'The three legal tongues of Roman Palestine played a critical part in the enlargement of Christian communities and the ordering of their mind. The legacies of that dominance would have to be transcended,' though he goes on to state that 'the logic for that necessity was present from the start' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 112). It could be argued, however, that Cragg's ready acceptance of Hebrew-Greek differences serves to support his own understanding of Scripture. It is an

---

16 Ibid., 62.
understanding which feeds his struggles with accepting what he sees as the ethnic exclusivity of the Old Testament and parts of the New.

Cragg also questions the sufficiency of those languages (or, indeed, any language) for Scripture. In referring to common problems that Muslims and Christians share in the reasonableness of their faith, he writes:

It will be wise to proceed by considering the related themes of language, personality and final significance within the incidence of revelation. The first has to do with the ability of speech and Scripture, in the temporal, plural world, to convey and house eternal truth (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 54).

Cragg, of course, solves this problem through his concept of the interactive nature of revelation which we deal with in the next section of this chapter.

Sanneh approaches it by explaining culture (and language) as 'instrumental'.

Most of the early converts had no living knowledge of the primary language of the preaching of Jesus. Clearly the early Christians understood that the language issue may be detached from the question of faithfulness to the message of Jesus Christ, and that gives us an important clue into culture as 'instrumental'.

For Sanneh culture continues to be a necessary part of the Christian faith and so its Scriptures.

Christianity thus came to adopt a plurality of cultures as natural extensions of the religious proclamation without surrendering the 'instrumental' view of culture . . . . Culture, however lofty or privileged, remains in the Pauline account an instrument and channel under God's undivided sovereignty. Yet that sovereignty, being 'one', is itself mediated to us through the 'many' bottlenecks of culture.

It is clear that in employing vernacular languages for translation, missionaries saw these languages as more than arbitrary devices. On the contrary, they saw them as endowed with divine significance, so that they may substitute completely for the language of revelation. The fact that all languages are, for the purposes of Christian translation, interchangeable,

---

17 Sanneh, Encountering the West, 134-5.
18 Ibid., 137-8.
makes them 'instrumental', so that in their very differences they all serve an identical purpose.¹⁹

For Sanneh, the Christian faith is a translated faith, both linguistically and theologically. The positive effects of what Sanneh called 'mother tongue projects', which missionaries carried out, can be seen in Africa today. They are in keeping with the very nature of the Christian message.

However ambiguous the record, it can be said that a Scripturally based mother tongue assurance became a salient part of the missionary record, and a pluralist Africa was thereby reinvigorated.²⁰

By attending first to the essential linguistic and cultural undercarriage of the [gospel] message and leaving the ultimate outcome to an indefinite future... the conveyers of the message put in place a formidable mother tongue Juggernaut which time and opportunity favoured.²¹

The process of translation and what is passed on to another culture is greater than just the word-by-word understanding of what was meant in the original text. As the new church interpreted Scripture, so can new cultures. With translation they are empowered to do it. This is true for all Christian Scriptures, not just the New Testament. In some instances, Leviticus and Esther may not be the choice of the first books to translate yet in other places they may be early choices because they highlight God's dealing with a particular people. According to Sanneh, they serve an 'instrumental' function.

Cragg does not share this instrumental view of culture. His driving motivation is that common ground of understanding between Christianity and Islam. Cultures' distinctives are 'ethnic' and separating. This

¹⁹ Ibid., 142.
²⁰ Ibid., 114.
²¹ Ibid.
A good example is Cragg's treatment of the question of Arabic translations of the Bible. In *The Arab Christian*, Cragg addresses the issue of how far Arab Christians' scriptures have helped or hindered their engagement with Islam. While Sanneh sees enormous advantage in the African context where people engage with others largely within their own cultures, Cragg concludes that overall the presently used translations of Arabic scriptures have not helped engagement with Islam. 'The inherent problematics of intelligent and intelligible communication between Christians and Muslims in the Arab context are there, disconcertingly, in the very feel of the Christian scriptures in Arabic' (*Arab Christian* 1991, 282).

Earlier translations have not done much better, according to Cragg. 'They did not mediate vocabulary into the mental world of Islam. Their norms of thought remained unrelated to the world of the Qur'ān' (*Arab Christian* 1991, 283). Thus Cragg concludes that 'the main lesson in the complex story of the Christian scriptures in Arabic is their distance from Islam. In literary shape they enshrine the same otherness that characterises traditional attitudes on the personal level and in society' (*Arab Christian* 1991, 284). And thus, the 'Christian Arabic scriptures speak in one theological dialect and the Qur'ān in another' (*Arab Christian* 1991, 285).
In a footnote to the text, Cragg indicates his solution to the problem. The direction of translation should be towards a high literary form, one which could be appreciated by Muslims who would be more likely to equate it with their Qur'an.

That only the literary language should be printed has long been instinctive to Arabic writers. Novels and plays have, it is true, come to concede that conversation is unreal if not colloquialized and so allowable in print. Christian evangelism has been eager to produce and circulate colloquial versions of the Gospel against the resistance of the guardians of true Arabic. Print, of course, presupposes literates, but the sense of a need to colloquize belongs within the larger problem of how language best serves meaning within the mental and religious exigencies of comprehension (Arab Christian 1991, 300).

Finally Cragg is not at all sanguine that Christians can get together to produce a good translation, which all, or at least many of them, can agree to. From Cragg’s point of view, past translations have been inadequate, primarily, because of their lack of engagement with Islam. The future does not look hopeful, according to Cragg.

The problem Cragg has identified is not unique to the Arab world. Earlier we noted that many Christian traditions have at least an element who hold to exclusive language for Scriptures and/or liturgy. Cragg’s proposal for a ‘higher’ version of Arabic for use in translating Christian Scriptures is tied to his desire to see Middle Eastern Christians engage with Islam. Yet Cragg himself has noted that that is not the nature of the Christian Scriptures (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 116). The Greek of the New Testament was largely the Greek of the marketplace. It was written for common understanding. Though Cragg acknowledges that Christian Scriptures can be translated because of the very different understanding of revelation in them compared with that of the
Qur'ân, his argument for a higher, more acceptable literary form is flawed and is inconsistent with other writing. He notes that colloquialised language has come into print in Arabic in novels and plays where conversations take place, so that they do not appear unreal. Surely the same principle should be applied to the narrative style of the vast majority of Christian Scriptures. Issues of terminology are one thing and it could be argued that translation of Christian Scriptures should come closer to common Muslim terminology here. Literary style, however, is quite a different matter.

There are other cultural criteria which should be taken into consideration for translation of Christian Scriptures into Arabic. Kenneth Bailey's argument regarding a common peasant culture is one. His emphasis on the parables of Jesus which we later take up (see Ch. 8) argues against a high literary approach and for a more colloquial style.

Further, if indeed Christianity is a translated faith, both linguistically and theologically, there is room for many translations. Sanneh argues that there is a self-corrective mechanism where society eventually demands adequate translation. Various forms of translation work keep happening until something emerges which is acceptable. There is validity to this argument as it does seem that in history Bible translation work tends to take place in waves to meet this need.²²

---

One final point worth making is that when he quotes the Bible, Cragg tends to use the Authorised Version. This may simply be habit, as that is the translation his generation would know best. But many others have made the change to more recent versions. One wonders if the language and style is more amenable to Cragg's understanding of translation.

In summary, although Cragg acknowledges that translation of Christian Scriptures is necessary, he does not adequately address the question of the purpose of translation or how it should be done. His early statements from *The Call of the Minaret* would seem to indicate an openness to all forms of translation, many of which now are coming into the Arab world. They include an Arabic cartoon television production called Super Book, the Living Bible translation, as well as carefully printed editions which are supposed to be more acceptable to Muslims. Some serve the particular communities while some are outreach-minded. In Cragg's later writing he presents a different perspective that would seem to be against popular translations.

Sanneh, on the other hand, by seeing language and culture quite differently, supports virtually all types of translation efforts as a positive process. He cites the mother-tongue projects of the missionary translators in Africa as proof for the validity of this argument. The cultural garb of the Bible does not hinder their own self-expression in a new cultural setting. Translation has provided the opposite effect. Cultures were empowered because the Word of God was theirs to interpret. They did not have to depend on another. What is more, the culturally-circumscribed Old Testament plays a prominent role in many of these tribes.
Not only does Cragg fail to give adequate acknowledgement to the instrumental role culture plays in the Christian Scriptures, he also partially attributes the religious distance between Muslim and Christian in the Arabic-speaking world to the Arabic Bible. It is not up to the Qur’án’s standard of eloquence, and it thus makes a poor comparison. Surely the literary style of the Qur’án, which Cragg acknowledges by its very nature to be utterly different from Christian Scriptures, should not be considered as an influencing factor for translation. Common ground is important but it does not need to be found in the style of translation where there are such vastly differing theologies between Christian and Muslim in their understanding of Scriptures. Thus, despite some statements to the contrary, in his desire for common ground with the Muslim Cragg seems to lean towards seeing translation of Christian Scriptures in a more Quranic light than many theologians might. This has the effect of actually narrowing what can be done through Christian Scriptures when it comes to engaging with Islam.

4.4 Revelation and Christian Scriptures

R. C. Zaehner, in challenging the western world with the question ‘Why not Islam?’ based his arguments on his perception of the relatively straightforward nature of revelation in the Qur’án versus the complexity of the same in Christianity and other religions.

There has never been any dispute as to what is Koran . . . . For once, then, God had spoken plainly in the full light of history . . . . his revelation in the Koran makes some sense. And free from theology as the Koran is, it even makes simple sense to simple men.23

In this same article, he was highly critical of Cragg’s approach to engagement with Islam.

Cragg in a whole series of books inspired by a passionate desire to understand Islam [has] an almost tormented empathy which never seems quite to grasp why the Koran is to Muslims what it is. And the real reason why he never makes the final break-through is that, as a devout and wholly dedicated Christian, he has not seriously asked himself Cantwell Smith’s question: ‘Is the Qur’an the Word of God?’

Zaehner was wrong on at least two counts. First in his assessment of Cragg, he failed properly to credit the fact that everyone, including himself, writes from a faith-position. Secondly, Zaehner’s glib characterisation of the nature of revelation for the Muslim in the Qur’an misses critical points about the value of revelation.

In his criticism of Cragg’s approach to the Qur’an, however, Zaehner does inadvertently shed light on Cragg’s approach to his own Christian Scriptures. The true nature of revelation is a, if not the, important concern for Cragg when he deals with issues of Scripture between Christianity and Islam. Cragg is empathetic and he does return to the Qur’an repeatedly precisely because the issue of the nature of revelation, Cragg’s model for his own Christian Scriptures, is important to him. In this section we consider key aspects of Cragg’s understanding of revelation.

---

4.4.1 Revelation: Bible or Christ

What people believe about God is directly related to what they understand to be revelation. In Christianity and Islam, God's self-revealing word is the form and substance of revelation. For Muslims, that word is the Qur'an; for Christians, Jesus Christ.  

It might be clearer to consider [the Bible] as a revelatory expression of something else that is the primary revelation... Jesus Christ — the ultimate interaction of God with man, and therefore the ultimate revelation of God and his relationship with man.

The above two quotes are from 1982 and 1995. Cragg, however, first articulated the concept decades earlier. 'It cannot be overemphasised that the Christian understanding of Christ is the Christian understanding of revelation' (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 289).

God in revelation is God in Christ. Revelation is not simply recorded in a book; it is embodied in a person. Is it not more fully, more appropriately, more effectively, revelation for that reason? The question may not be readily appreciated by the Muslim accustomed to the idea of a Book as the point of revelatory impact (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 290).

Generally the innovation of comparing Christ to the Qur'an has been credited to Smith.  

Indeed, Zaehner, in his critique of Cragg, called him to this logical consequence, again citing Smith, whom he also said was the first to have considered the 'radical' idea of comparing Christ with the Qur'an.  

We have noted (see Ch. 2) that both Zwemer and Gairdner were close to overt comparison of Christ to the Qur'an instead of the Bible to the Qur'an, but it took another generation to give it full expression. In his response to Zaehner, Cragg makes a dismissive 'I've already thought of that' answer and then

---

27 See Chapman, Cross and Crescent, 76.
further develops his understanding of the nature of revelation. It is based on
the understanding already quoted above in *The Call of the Minaret* ('How Not

Whether this comparison was first articulated by Smith, Cragg or someone
else, the basis for it is clearly evident in the above quote in *The Call of the
Minaret* (1956), Cragg's earliest full book. The question from where the
understanding first came is not so significant as is why it came and then why it
came *at this time.* We deal first with this. Later we consider aspects of what it
means for Cragg, as it is an injustice to leave him with this simple statement.
For him the meaning and implications are much too profound for such a
simple comparison. Nevertheless, we will argue the comparison remains
valid throughout Cragg's career but perhaps is more accurately characterised by
saying that Cragg seeks to compare revelation to revelation in Christianity and
Islam rather than Christ to the Qur'ān.

Traditional understanding holds that the Bible tells about Christ, predicted in
the Old, fulfilled in the New, who was God's supreme revelation. Zwemer
and Gairdner, though recognising the different natures of the Qur'ān and the
Bible, never did make the jump to an actual comparison of Christ to the
Qur'ān when engaging with Muslims on the topic of revelation (See 3.3.3,
3.4.2.2). They continued with contrasts and comparisons with the Bible. One
wonders why a comparison of 'revelations' was not considered. There is a
reference in the Qur'ān to Jesus as God's 'Word' (Surah 4:171) as well as in the

28 Zaehner, 'Why Not Islam,' 168.
Bible (John 1:1, 14). But these brief references were not picked up, perhaps because such an understanding of revelation has more to do with later twentieth century theology. Clearly there has been a shifting theological perspective. This new perspective reflects changes in two areas: 1) the understanding of the nature of Christian Scriptures in the church, and, 2) the nature of Muslim-Christian engagement.

4.4.1.1 History of seeing revelation in Christ rather than the Bible

In a simplified summary of his exhaustive evidence, Roman Catholic theologian René Latourelle notes that in patristic times revelation was primarily seen to be housed in Christ about whom Scripture gives testimony.29 Wolfhart Pannenberg bears this out. 'In patristic writings the primary reference of revelation was always to Christ . . .'30 It was not until the Middle Ages that this began to change. Latourelle attributes the major change to Thomas Aquinas.31 Pannenberg supports this, noting that the change was pivotal for Reformation theology.

[In the Latin Middle Ages] the concept of revelation acquired a basic theological function in close connection with the authority of scripture. Thus we read in Aquinas that the divine truth of salvation, because it is above human reason, must be communicated by revelation, and this revelation came to the prophets and apostles and is to be found in the biblical writings.

This change . . . was . . . determinative for Reformation thinking on the relation between revelation and biblical authority.32

---

Pannenberg then traces the theological history of the concept of revelation, through general and special revelation to Martin Kähler and then to Karl Barth where he notes a point significant for our thesis. 'The Word is not just the proclamation of the gospel on the one hand nor holy scripture on the other. It is the person of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God.'

After covering further history and nuance of meaning Pannenberg himself gives his theological statement.

Jesus Christ, then, is the Word of God as the quintessence of the divine plan for creation and history and of its end-time but already proleptic revelation. We may thus speak of the self-revelation of God by this Word of his and it is revelation so long as the Word is the same as the deity of God.

The above is a thumbnail sketch of a now quite common view of the nature of revelation where the focus is on Christ as the Word rather than the Bible as the Word.

We further illustrate this point with an example from the Presbyterian Church, USA, where, through its Confessions, there is documentary evidence of change. Briefly the Westminster Confession of 1643 reflected 'the exaggerated concern for the authority of Scripture that characterized the orthodox theology of that time.' It referred to Christian Scriptures as the Word of God many times but never used that expression for Jesus. This position of 'an authoritative canon of Scripture ... as just the Word of God

---

33 Ibid., 227.
34 Ibid., 257.
written grew out of the Reformation's concern for the authority of Christian Scriptures over the church. Orthodox Presbyterianism continued to maintain a similar position on Christian Scriptures well into the time of Zwemer and Gairdner. B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) from his leading role at Princeton Theological Seminary has a position formally similar to that of the Westminster Confession.

What is important to recognize is that the Scriptures themselves represent the Scriptures as not merely containing here and there the record of revelations — 'words of God'... given by God, but as themselves, in all their extent, a revelation, an authoritative body of gracious instructions from God; or, since they alone, of all the revelations which God may have given, are extant — rather as the Revelation, the only 'Word of God' accessible to men, in all their parts 'law,' that is, authoritative instruction from God.

This is contrasted with the Confession of 1967. According to this new view, Christ is God's supreme revelation. Christian Scriptures bear witness to that. Even how the topic of the Bible was introduced in the Confession was significant. The paragraphs on the Bible were contained in a sub-section of 'The Communion of the Holy Spirit'.

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written.

Dowey, in his commentary on the significance of the Confession notes the use of the upper case 'W' and lower case 'w' as a device adopted from the Revised Standard Version Bible to make the point that 'It is through the Scriptures,

37 Ibid.
rather than to them (as the Westminster Confession teaches) that the Spirit bears witness. The implication being:

The Confession carefully avoids saying either that Scripture 'is' God's word or that Scripture 'is' unique and authoritative as such or in its own right. It is in the function of living witness, to Christ the Word that it has its unique place, without parallel, and on this basis the Scriptures are received and obeyed as the word of God written.

Although this concept was initially rejected by many evangelicals in the Presbyterian Church and was not incorporated immediately into the wide range of popular theologies, today it has gained a widespread acceptance.

What is of significance to our thesis is that for those who have engaged with Islam the need for this distinction articulated in the Confession of 1967 was, perhaps, more immediately apparent and so found expression in popular theologies rather earlier. Hints of the view that revelation is housed in the person of Christ rather than generally in the Bible are discernible in both Zwemer's and Gairdner's writings as they grappled with Quranic issues (see 3.3.3, 3.4.2.2). This was still in the days of B. B. Warfield yet their hints pre-date Barth's new explanation of revelation. An overview of major trends in the history of Muslim-Christian engagement will help shed further light on this phenomenon.

39 Emphasis original; *ibid.*, 100.
40 Emphasis original to indicate the wording of the Confession; *ibid.*, 100-101.
41 For instance the author noted an event in the tri-annual Intervarsity Christian Fellowship (USA and Canada) Urbana Missionary conference of Dec. 27-31, 1996, a student movement which is a successor to the student movements in which Gairdner, Zwemer and then Cragg participated. Bible study continues to be a high priority of this movement. Individual and small group Bible studies are combined with plenary session Bible Readings and application. Ms. Robbie Castleman, responsible for leading 'application' in the conference, introduced her topic in a plenary session by saying, "The word, with a small 'w' tells us about the Word, with a big 'W' which is Christ." This was a fully accepted summary of how the Bible is seen in Inter-Varsity, USA, today. This statement possibly would not have been heard twenty years ago, not because it
4.4.1.2 History of Muslim-Christian encounter

Two scholars, Arne Rudvin and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, though coming from different perspectives, give roughly the same assessment on developments in Muslim-Christian encounter. The Norwegian Islamic scholar and Bishop, Rudvin, has categorised and named what he considers to be three distinct phases for Christian and Muslim engagement. The first phase was one of 'refutation'. This refutation was the quality which marked both Muslim and Christian writers of the Middle Ages. One of the several examples Rudvin notes was the Greek writer Nicetas of Byzantium of the ninth century and his work *Refutatio Mohomedis*. A Muslim example of a similar period is 'The Perfect Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus According to the Clear Text of the Gospel', attributed to al-Ghazali, in which the author set out to prove that the way Christians have interpreted St. John's Gospel to demonstrate the divinity of Christ is in reality contrary to what the verses really mean.

Rudvin identifies the second period as 'confrontation'. He notes as an example Kraemer and specifically his book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. Finally, he categorises the obvious third phase as 'dialogue'. According to Rudvin, these phases

would have been considered theologically incorrect so much as it was unnecessary to make that distinction.

---

42 Arne Rudvin, 'The Gospel and Islam: What Sort of Dialogue Is Possible?' *Al-Mushir* 21 (1979), 82-123. This *radd* (refutation) is not universally accepted as Al-Ghazali's own authentic work. It may have been attributed to him later, although Rudvin does not question it. See Gaudeul *Encounters & Clashes*, Vol. 1, 97.
43 Ibid., 82.
44 Ibid.
Reflect a transition in the relationship between Christianity and Islam from the stage of fanaticism to tolerance and on to relativism. They bring to light both negative and positive aspects of the theological relationship between Christianity and Islam, and at the same time correspond roughly to the course of external, political relations between Christians and Muslims.\textsuperscript{45}

Smith makes a similar assessment though he uses different categories and does not develop the same sense of linear history since ideas held in the Middle Ages are still held by some today. Still his categories are strikingly similar to Rudvin's.

For Smith the 'classical' interpretation by Christians is that Islam is a heresy of Christianity. This roughly corresponds with Rudvin's 'refutation' classification. The classical Muslim interpretation, on the other hand, is that Jesus was one of a line of prophets, the culmination of which was Muhammad. Any disagreements between the Bible and the Qur'an are because Christians have corrupted their Scriptures. This is the straightforward understanding which has been with us since the Middle Ages.

For Smith, the second phase was first seen in the nineteenth century when Muslims and Christians saw one another as members of different faiths. This matches Rudvin's description of the period of tolerance where there can be argument and refutation but not rejection in the same way.

But finally for Smith, 'The most fruitful and responsible way to formulate the issue in the light of present-day knowledge and current sophisticated sensibilities, and particularly in terms of world history, the religious history of

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 83.
our race, is a question not yet answered." This conclusion matches Rudvin’s final category of ‘dialogue’. Thus Smith’s assessments and conclusion about developments in Christian-Muslim encounter are similar to Rudvin’s but are not tied into a time frame. It is also worth noting that these phases correspond with pre-modern, modern and post-modern world-views. Non-religious philosophical thought in the Western world was changing as well.

We do not try to define dialogue here, as it can be defined in a variety of ways. Equally it can be utilised for a variety of purposes. Cragg, Rudvin, and Smith all engage in dialogue with Islam but in different ways, to different ends, and so with different results. As with any conversation, for dialogue to take place there must be common ground. In the last century the nature of encounter between Christianity and Islam was such that there was no need to find that common ground. Consequently the implications of whether the comparison of Christ to the Qur’ān was an acceptable theological framework were not considered.

In summary, what seems now to be the obvious comparison by Christians of Christ to the Qur’ān was not made earlier because of a changing philosophical world-view in the West, the history of relations between the two faiths, as well as internal Christian theological developments. The comparison of revelation to revelation rather than book to book assumes an openness to another faith not present in the stages of refutation and confrontation.

---

4.4.2 Cragg's understanding of revelation

There is no doubt that Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures has always been coloured by his engagement with Islam. That engagement has motivated him to look beyond external belief systems.

The clue [to universal claim and actual diversity] probably lies in some sense of the interior validity of belief which, in its inwardness, does not disqualify, and is not disqualified by, the outside 'quarrel' of contrasted or divergent systems (Alive to God 1970, 27).

One important 'interior validity of belief' for Cragg is revelation. We have noted that Zaehner assumed that revelation in Islam involves straightforward, dictated words from God. Motivated by a common ground for dialogue Cragg disagrees that this is, in fact, the true nature of revelation in Islam. Though there are many sceptical critics, he concludes that a dictated book is a false assumption.

The view . . . which Zaehner offers is one from which Muslims themselves are struggling to be freed. The concept of an absolutist Book, arbitrarily dictated from heaven to an unlettered prophet who transmits it, like an oracle, into time and the human audience, without mental or spiritual participation in its content, is in no way necessary to, or affirmed in, the Qur'an itself. It arises from the familiar quest of religious establishment for certitude and the indubitable. To fasten it upon Islam as the sole and inevitable thesis about the nature of the Qur'an is no part of intelligent religious relationship from faiths outside the Qur'an's community ('How Not Islam?' 1977, 390).

In seeking to broaden the understanding of revelation in Islam, he applies the same framework to Christian Scriptures. Cragg's central approach is not, What is the purpose of Christian Scriptures and what is it that they say? Instead, his question is, What is revelation in Christianity and how do Christian Scriptures participate in that revelation? By asking the same question of Islam and its Qur'an he finds common ground between the faiths in his exploration of
revelation. This approach is useful in that it sheds light on a Christian understanding of the Qur'an. It is also helpful in that it may help educated Muslims with points of reference they can understand in the Christian faith. But it does not ask other questions of Christian Scriptures and so it remains a single-model approach which brings its own set of liabilities. What tends to happen is that Christian Scriptures only have value inasmuch as they contribute towards this single model which, in fact, is Cragg's understanding of revelation.

Between the Bible and the Qur'an Cragg concludes that there are 'different scriptural liabilities'. He points out that in Christianity 'revelation is received via personality and "the flesh" of ministry and suffering' (emphasis mine; 'How Not Islam?' 1977, 390). Because of these differences, there is good reason, according to Cragg, for there to be a comparison between the Qur'an as 'the Word' and Jesus as 'the Word', since,

The Qur'an, seen as book-revelation, is necessarily involved in the problems which Christian faith encounters and undertakes in the Incarnation. These are the issues of the eternal in the temporal, the divine in the human, the universal in the particular ('How Not Islam?' 1977, 390).

While the implications for Cragg's understanding of revelation are extensive, his basic understanding can be distilled down to three different points.

Revelation is personal. There is always an element of suffering with it due to the basic nature of humankind. And, finally, it is participatory with active involvement on the part of the recipient and not just the giver. These attributes of revelation lie beneath the external belief system of Christianity.
Also beneath the external belief system they are present in Islam as well, according to Cragg. Their presence in Islam has to point to Christ as true revelation. This, of course, is a challenge to traditional interpretations of the Qur'an. But similarly Cragg has challenged some traditional understandings of the Bible. The true nature of revelation is vitally important for him, as it forms at least one common ground, a point of reference for an understanding, which moves beyond rigid, external belief systems and brings peoples of different faiths together where they can at least communicate.

4.4.2.1 Revelation through personality

For Cragg the nature of revelation is that it is personal in both Islam and Christianity regardless of the differing external belief systems. In Christianity it comes before Christ and can be seen in prophethood, which the Bible later links to Christ.

'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken unto us in his Son' (Heb. 1:1). 'By the prophets,' 'in the Son'; these are the preparatory and the culminating phases of the same enterprise of revelation (*Call of the Minaret* 1956, 289).

The personal nature of prophethood is part of revelation. About Jeremiah and his 'confessions', Cragg writes:

There is no doubt that here experience within prophethood has become more ultimately significant than the message verbally delivered. . . . The prophethood has become the personality, in the sense that the final significance is carried by a figure in a setting, not essentially by a verbalism in a mouthpiece (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 65).

To help clarify Cragg's concept of revelation through personality, we contrast it to another understanding of personal revelation. In considering various
aspects of revelation, Goldingay begins with the personal. By this he means the individual visions or 'direct' communications prophets received from God. Some examples in the Bible are Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah or John's vision recorded in the book of Revelation.\footnote{Goldingay, Models for Scripture, 299-301.} This is not what Cragg means. His is a personalising of revelation where it is lived out in the agony of life. He often cites the example of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah’s prophetic vocation, more than usually tragic, provokes in him those so-called Confessions, in which he bitterly expostulates with God about his experience in an unrelenting mission amid an unrepentant people (Jer. 8.18-9.3; 12.1-5; 15.10-18; 20.7-9; 20.14-18) (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 65).

The message becomes personal in the prophet. According to Cragg, prophethood in the Old Testament has qualities which can be compared to the Qur'an which in turn has links with the New Testament Christ.

In this sense to study Muhammad, as it were, existentially, to reckon with his role in the Qur'an intensively, is to realise a situation which can bring us, and perhaps Muslims with us, closer to what is the vital clue within the New Testament. The clue is the fact that the more existential, as distinct from mere message-bearing, we see prophethood to be, the more we discover that it takes on, and takes over, personality (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 63).

It is not prophecy but rather prophethood that is important for Cragg. For example Cragg would not deny that the author of Matthew's Gospel sees fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy to be critical to authentication of Jesus as the Christ of God. For Cragg, however, these 'fulfilments' can be understood equally as the author reading back into history and putting interpretations into the past that may be acceptable but not necessarily demanded by the text. It is not that they are untrue or inaccurate, but rather they are, if not actually
revisionist, highly interpretative. The Messiah could be fulfilled because, ‘[Jesus] had only been Messiah by first redrawing all the criteria’ (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 72).

These prophecies are part of the external belief system which divides peoples of different religions. What is more, they address Jewish people but not Arab. Thus for Cragg prophethood and the way revelation comes through the person of the prophet is what is important. Prophecy and its fulfilment divides, rather than brings together. Thus is it not the word or propositions, but the person which is the key to revelation. There are propositions between Christianity and Islam but Cragg has discovered a shared intrinsic understanding of prophethood. By moving away from a ’Thus saith the Lord’ to a person, Cragg is able to defuse a major area of controversy — provided others move with him.

4.4.2.2 Revelation through suffering

For Cragg there is a ‘discernible kinship between the divine nature and the prophetic suffering, linked as these must in some measure be by the very feasibility of revelation’ (Returning to Mount Hira’ 1994, 72). He notes that ‘there is ... a sequence from Jesus to Christ to Lord, from teaching to suffering to glory, from being prophet to being rejected to being redemptive’ (’Doing the New Testament Right’ 1982, 37). Further, ‘When suffering is incurred “in the way of truth” the taking of it goes on serving that truth, doing so differently and also more vitally... So doing, it expresses divine power and wisdom in
more ultimate terms' (Returning to Mount Hira' 1994, 72). Thus for Cragg there is a direct link between suffering and revelation.

The suffering servant is a theme present in Islam as well. 'In his prophethood until the emigration to Medina, Muhammad suffered a similar experience of travail and danger. Indeed, he is warned that he may well die without seeing the fruit of his vocation' ('Doing the New Testament Right' 1982, 37). 'The malignity messengers have to encounter and sustain is clear enough in the Qur'an. In its survey it records how "some were said to be liars and some were put to death"' (Returning to Mount Hira' 1994, 70).

In his earlier writing and even later when addressing the conservative Christian audience, Cragg is more likely to stress the radically different paths Christianity and Islam take in response to the inevitable 'vocation' of suffering in prophethood. 'Emigration is exchanged for militancy' because it was assumed that the 'prophet-word and the prophet-person' must survive together because there was no hope for the 'message' without the 'unique messenger' ('Doing the New Testament Right' 1982, 37). For Christianity it was vastly different.

The New Testament situation is altogether in contrast. ...when prophetic ministry, through rejection, heads toward tragedy. Defenselessness, in that physical sense, must be [the prophets'] posture. The evil in society that opposes them is an enmity to truth, which necessarily turns into a justified enmity to a cause if the prophethood becomes belligerent ('Doing the New Testament Right' 1982, 37).

In later writing he presents a different perspective, seeing more rather than less common ground between Christianity and Islam. Publishing in 1994 Cragg again draws on author Muhammad Kamil Husain's Qaryah Zalimah
which he had translated forty-five years earlier (City of Wrong 1959). As we noted earlier, according to Cragg Husain accurately interprets a key event for the Christian faith, while still remaining firmly within a deeply Quranic understanding (see 2.5.3).

This is an example of a Muslim seeing Christianity in a different way through bypassing the external belief systems to look at the true nature of God’s revelation to humankind through suffering in ‘prophethood’. The point can be made the other way as well and Cragg does so. For example he uses the events of the Hijrah (emigration) to argue that there is a basic acceptance in Islam of ‘things vicarious’, a key to Christian understanding of the cross. Vicarious punishment (i.e. Jesus dying for sinners), is overtly condemned in Islam. The example of the muhajirun (emigrants) who went against kinship ties and acted as private persons, has been used to argue this point. They chose for themselves, not others. Yet, Cragg notes

The dictum that ‘no burden-bearer bears the burden of another’ cannot apply in what personal guilt entails on others, though guilt and retribution remain the doer’s alone. There are consequences. These are rarely confined to the guilty parties. When consequences are taken forgivingly situations can be redeemed and the evildoers also, through repentance and a making new of the self. There is nothing inevitable about this. It may fail and evil continue on its way. There are no forgiven without the forgiving and suffering for another is the clue to grace. In that sense, vicarious redemption happens every day and only by means of it is life retrieved from vengeance, hatred and festering enmity (Returning to Mount Hira’ 1994, 121-122).

So the principles of vicarious suffering and vicarious redemption are present in Islam, not just Christianity. This point in Cragg’s theology of revelation has implications for his understanding of the atonement in Christianity. We deal
with that below. Our point here is his understanding of the link between revelation and suffering.

4.4.2.3 Revelation through participation

'Revelation, properly understood, is not communiqué but apprehension, and cannot ensue unless, like a bridge, it belongs with either side of what it spans' (Christian and Other Religion 1977, 35). For Cragg response is part of revelation. 'The capacity for revelation through prophets as instruments relates to the capacity for revelation in people as listeners' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 54). It cannot happen in a vacuum because then it is not revelation.

In neither [Bible or Qur'an] properly understood, is there a substance we properly receive in passive credulity. Engage we must — with mind and feeling. This means that no scriptures truly fulfil their role in faith if supposed to do so infallibly. Nor indeed could they have been brought into being that way. Revelation, wherever we believe it to reside in scriptures, is surely transactional, where divine initiative and human recognition inter-act (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 54).

The participatory nature of revelation began with creation. God risked and let go. Creation is an area where Christians and Muslims can agree. It is the first instance which demonstrates that revelation is participatory. 'There is a sense, common to the Scriptures, biblical and Quranic, in which creation has engaged the will of the Creator with the will of the creature. So much revelation, per se signifies, however diversely we receive its contents.' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 53-4).

'The Old Testament, shortly after the inclusive affirmation of creation, moves into an exclusive mode of ethnicity and antipathy towards those outside'
Cragg's approach, though referencing both the Qur'an and the Bible, is not so much based on comparative scriptures as it is on the significance of creation for both Christian and Muslim. As will be seen in the section on the Old and New Testaments, his theology moves him straight from creation to prophecy to Gethsemane to the Epistles and the formation of the church. The basis of Cragg's theology revolves around the concept of revelation. What for others is a jump (creation to prophethood) for Cragg is a link, the latter shedding light on the former. The key to that link is revelation.

In Cragg the Epistles and the formation of the church are perhaps the best example of the participatory nature of revelation. The Epistles are the response to the Christ event recorded in the Gospels. That response is part of revelation.

In Christian reckoning Paul and Peter and John and others, wrestling with the shaping of thought and conduct in nascent communities, are eminently qualified to participate in what will come to be received as Scripture, given that people in places are the focus of what faith stands to mean where life in it is lived (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 110).

The formation and attestation of the church to the canon of Scriptures is yet another example of the participatory nature of revelation (above). And, finally, the ongoing response of the community of believers, too, is part of revelation. 'If [transactional revelation] must be true of how scriptures eventuate, it must be decisive for how they are read' (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 32).
It is possible that in his understanding of the participatory nature of revelation Cragg was ahead of his time. Recently some evangelical theologians have come up with an understanding of God which contains the element of interaction. While not itself revelation, the concepts are not unrelated.

The Christian life involves a genuine interaction between God and human beings. We respond to God’s gracious initiatives and God responds to our responses ... God takes risks in this give-and-take relationship, yet he is endlessly resourceful and competent in working toward his ultimate goals ... God [sometimes] works with human decisions, adapting his own plans to fit the changing situation. God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialogue, God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being.  

By looking at the Christian faith anew through his dialogue with Islam one wonders if Cragg has anticipated yet another theological development in the evangelical world similar to that of comparing Christ rather than the Bible to the Qur’an.

4.4.3 Revelation: a single interpretative model for Christian Scriptures

Cragg does not define revelation. Instead he develops an understanding of it which acts as a definition. For Cragg, revelation has the three elements of the personal, the suffering and the interactive. The points Cragg makes are based in Christian Scriptures and the Qur’an but rather than a definition of revelation they are elements of it. This is not the way revelation has commonly been understood in Christian tradition.

In Christian theology [revelation] is used both of the corpus of truth about Himself which God discloses to us and of the process by which His communication of it takes place. Traditional theology has tended to

---

conceive of revelation in the latter sense as taking place through propositions.49

Nor can Cragg’s understanding be drawn easily from the Bible itself. Evangelicals are quick to point out that ‘the claim of the Bible from beginning to end, is that God has spoken.’50 Cragg’s understanding of revelation is personal and idiosyncratic. Thus it must be explained each time he writes on the subject. That is a difficulty. Another approach would be to accept the common understanding but develop his concepts through the use of less traditional words. It is interesting to note that Cragg objects to Smith’s theological method of redefining key terms (Troubled by Truth 1992, 244-5). While Cragg does not begin by ‘reaching for the dictionary’, he too redefines revelation through usage.

Through his engagement with Islam, Cragg is prompted to ask the question, What is the nature of revelation in Christianity and Islam? Christian Scriptures are then examined according to the value of their contribution to that revelation. Cragg could be accused by Christians and Muslims alike of not correctly reading the essentials of their faiths. These accusations, however, are the occupational hazard of pioneers. The opposition does not invalidate Cragg’s insights per se.

The larger problem is that by his emphasis on revelation Cragg has developed a single-model approach to Christian Scriptures. He has not taken seriously

how else Christian Scriptures might be studied apart from the contribution they make towards his understanding of revelation. Cragg's writing, 'inspired by . . . tormented empathy', seeks the common ground between Christianity and Islam, according to Zaehner (above). And Cragg's response to Zaehner ('How Not Islam?' 1977) probes the true nature of revelation, which then become the spectacles through which he sees Christian Scriptures and the Qur'an.

Before we further critique this single model, we note that Cragg is not unaware of different styles and purposes of writing in Christian Scriptures. There are several places where he argues that the Bible must not be read or interpreted in a way that was 'not intended'. He notes differences for instance, between the Gospels and Epistles versus the Book of Revelation (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 123), or the poetry of Psalms versus historical narrative (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 52-7). But these are common themes and are to be expected from any thoughtful reader.

More hopefully, a further example of Cragg's awareness of different models for Scriptures can be seen in what he has to say about those who use the historical-critical method. Though he himself appreciates it, its usage is not a characteristic of his approach to Christian Scriptures. In a response to those who utilise historical-critical methods in their recurring quest for the historical Jesus Cragg identifies the nature of the New Testament as consisting of documents which 'are not debaters but witnesses' ('According to the Scriptures' 1981, 24). He later elaborates as to the nature of this witness.
It is vital, therefore, to receive the New Testament Scriptures in the temper of their own origin. One cannot well infallibilize what does not come that way. . . . [The New Testament] invites us to read its language in accord with its nature, reckoning perceptively with the event-faith quality from which it plainly speaks ('According to the Scriptures' 1981, 25).

Nevertheless, in what seems to be a contradiction to this awareness, in practice Cragg sticks to his single-model approach to Scripture. Despite his use of words to describe the nature of Christian Scriptures as 'witness' (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 142) and 'tradition' (*Ibid.*, 160), he does not pick up on an alternate model, such as 'witnessing tradition' for understanding parts of Christian Scriptures.

Though the single model of revelation undoubtedly has validity for aspects of interpretation in Christian Scriptures, Zaehner has correctly noted that it has a larger and less debatable role in the Qur'an and the Muslims' understanding of how their holy book came to be. Again, it can be argued that one can detect at least correlation if not causation in Cragg's engagement with Islam. Does the dominant model of the Qur'an being revelation contribute to Cragg's single-model approach to Christian Scriptures? On the surface to even consider that it might seems odd, and some might say unfair. Cragg is articulate, accurate and extensive in his reflections on the difference in approach Muslims and Christians have to their Scriptures. Nevertheless despite the fact that Cragg recognises these differences, his grounds for engagement are commonly reflections on the true nature of revelation. It would seem that the Islamic approach to revelation has affected Cragg's view of his own Christian

---

51 Goldingay argues that 'witnessing tradition' is perhaps the most useful and all-encompassing of models for Christian Scriptures. But nevertheless it cannot be used alone. *Models for Scripture, 19–82.*
Scriptures whether as a concurrence or as a reaction which finds expression in re-interpretation.\(^{52}\)

Another area of difficulty in focusing on revelation in this way is one Lamb has noted where Cragg is accused of 'blurring the distinction between the revelation of God and the general experience, intellectual and emotional, of humanity'.\(^{53}\) Indeed, Rudvin critiques Cragg's contribution at the Kandy, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Conference of 1967 where he quotes Cragg as calling for

... closer attention to the theology of nature and ... incarnation ... to think cooperatively with other creeds ... to serve the Gospel of Christ ... in commitment to men's ideas and needs which the incarnation itself exemplifies.\(^{54}\)

About this perspective Rudvin writes:

[For Cragg] the incarnation is a symbol of the necessity and mode of dialogue. ... But this is a strange misinterpretation of the Incarnation and one which is strongly at odds with traditional Incarnation-theology, which emphatically maintains that the meaning of the Incarnation is precisely that after the fall God could not reveal Himself truly to man through 'natural' man but that it was necessary for God Himself to become man.\(^{55}\)

Thus Rudvin accuses Cragg of not properly answering the arguments of continental theologians such as Kraemer for the need of special revelation and not just natural revelation and theology.

\(^{52}\) Cragg's approach to revelation also parallels developments in Christian theology. It was only well into the twentieth century that theologians slipped, almost unconsciously, into referring to revelation as a central category for understanding Christian Scriptures. This is obvious from the fact that the word 'revelation' began to appear in the titles of books. See for instance, Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, Dublin: MacMillian, 1983; or Carl Henry, ed. *Revelation and the Bible*, London: Tyndale, 1959.

\(^{53}\) Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 15.

\(^{54}\) Rudvin, 'The Gospel and Islam,' 114

\(^{55}\) Ibid.
Cragg has in fact responded to Kraemer, and did so well before Rudvin's criticism ('Hearing by the Word of God' 1957 and Christianity in World Perspective 1968). In so doing, however, he did not address the categories of special versus natural revelation. Rather, quite typically, he based his argument against Kraemer on the arrogance of a theology which he saw as exclusive in character.

Taking Kraemer's position, what are we to say of a theology that characterises all other religions, indeed all religions, as essentially misguided and abortive? By this Divine absolutism in Jesus Christ Kraemer reduces the content of all other faiths to incidental traces, not essential elements, of what God has decisively chosen to vouchsafe outside them. If being thus exclusive is a reproach, the Christian Gospel just has to accept it, for it is God's doing, though, in some eyes, it be not marvellous (Christianity in World Perspective 1968, 78).

This is not, however, an entirely fair representation of Kraemer, whose theology is based on the distinction between natural and special revelation. Within the bounds of his definition of natural revelation Kraemer can be quite complimentary of other faiths.

They are the product of man's great efforts in the field of religion, and it must be affirmed with all possible clearness that the primitive apprehension of existence, from which the great naturalist religions sprang, has proved to be particularly creative both for good and ill in the matter of religion. 56

Cragg does not mention Kraemer's major point of natural or special revelation in his critiques of him. Instead Cragg's search for compassionate understanding clouds the waters of theological clarity.

Finally it is worth considering how Cragg's ideas have developed in others influenced by him. Two different Protestant streams have drawn from Cragg's

---

concept of revelation. Kenneth Nolin, an American missionary with significant Middle Eastern experience, was influenced by Cragg. He drew on the concept of comparing Christ and the Qur'ān rather than the Qur'ān and the Bible. However, his logic took him one step further, moving him outside orthodox christology.

The correct parallels are the Christ and the Qur'ān . . . Christians should heed the Qur'ānic warnings about deifying [Jesus] in place of God. Even if he shares the essence of deity as no other man has (even the Qur'ān admits this), to isolate him for worship, or even to imply it in our prayers and creeds, is certainly a form of idolatry. The more exalted the idol, the more dangerous the worship to the exclusion of God!

It would seem that for Nolin the concepts of suffering servant and prophethood find logical but different conclusion from Cragg's when it comes to Christology. It is, perhaps, not the only logical outcome to Cragg's understanding of the nature of revelation but nevertheless it remains a possibility.

We have already noted another place where Cragg's views have found root in evangelical circles. Here the motivation is that of evangelism and of being able to find an understanding which the Muslim can appreciate and which will not lead to endless discussion on the nature of Scriptures. Colin Chapman is emphatic.

It is essential for Christians to realise that the Qur'ān is to Muslims what Jesus is to Christians. It is a mistake to make a direct comparison between the role of Jesus in Christianity and the role of Muhammad in Islam, or between the place of the Bible in Christianity and the place of the Qur'ān in Islam.

---

At a more popular level we have seen that Fuad Accad makes the same point. Cragg has not developed a different theology of Christian Scriptures and neither have many evangelicals who have picked up this comparison. Given the customary emphasis evangelicals have on Scriptures one wonders if their acceptance of comparing Christ to the Qur'an without much further thought might have the effect of reducing the central place those Scriptures have traditionally held in their theology. Thus, two different Protestant streams both have accepted an understanding of revelation in Christianity and Islam which Cragg had earlier developed. One has led to a reduction of traditional Christology, while for the other their high view of Scriptures, central to that theology, is moved out of centre stage. Cragg’s contribution in this area has led at least to some change. It is more than just semantics or words.

There is no better summary of Cragg’s position than his own words which can be used about revelation. ‘Perhaps in the end, through all the controversies we have here ignored, there emerges this conjecture: was it Islam’s calling to guard the fact of that greatness and the Christians’ to cherish humanly how great it is?’ (‘Islam and Incarnation’ 1974, 138).
5. Judgement and Nation: Cragg on the Old Testament

In Cragg's writings the Old Testament does not feature very prominently. He does, however, quote from it fairly often and there are parts of it, particularly creation and the prophets, to which he regularly refers. In what he does write about his approach to the Old Testament, there is a clearly discernible progression from his earlier to this later writings. For instance, we demonstrate below that *The Call of the Minaret* (1956) has quite a traditional understanding of the Old Testament, while *The Lively Credentials of God* (1995) goes as far as questioning the ethics or morality of the covenant with Israel. We highlight the change in Cragg's writings as applicable.

The theological difficulties Cragg encounters are the liabilities which result from his single-model approach to Scriptures. These become apparent as he tries to hold three aspects of his theology together: a conservative view of Christian Scriptures, a single model which values Scriptures for their contribution to his understanding of revelation, and large parts of the Old Testament (such as the historical books) which have little or nothing to do with his interpretation of revelation but on the surface seem to go against New Testament values.

Cragg's understanding of the canon and the church's authenticating role for Scripture, leads him to accept the Bible as both Scripture and as closed canon. But in characteristic honesty, this does not stop him from expressing problems. In Cragg's writings, there are several recurring themes which reflect questions
he has about the Old Testament. Yet all are related in one way or another to
his approach to Christian Scriptures as only revelation. This chapter begins by
briefly highlighting different difficulties Cragg has with the Old Testament, all
of which arise in one way or another, from his single-model approach of
revelation. It then critiques his approach and offers alternatives.

5.1 Difficulties in the Old Testament

5.1.1 Tribalism and exclusivity

In the light of the universal gospel of the New Testament, Cragg struggles with
the 'tribalism' of the Old Testament. 'It seems sadly right to conclude that
within the Bible the earlier Scriptures proceed in general from a quite different
understanding of peoplehood than the later Scriptures' (Christ and the Faiths
1986, 332). This is seen even in the character of God where 'the writer in
Judges 11:24 sees divinity in terms of sheer tribalism' (Lively Credentials of
God 1995, 56). In his latest writing Cragg questions even further the very
concept of a covenant people. 'What has characterised [Jewry] has been an
intense focus of concentration, an insupportable form of spiritual property,
often-times too precious to be borne, namely the covenantal state of "chosen-
peoplehood"' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 52).

In his earliest writing, The Call of the Minaret, Cragg does not pick up on this
aspect of the Old Testament at all. It was in later writings that he first began to
articulate it. It is not so much people's identity in history which becomes the
problem for Cragg, but more the fact that it is included in Christian Scriptures
and used by Christians today. Cragg decries a particular type of use of the Old Testament in today's church because it perpetuates an exclusivity instead of the universal church.

If we agree that peoplehood under God, in the New Testament, is genuinely open to all on the sole ground of faith and indifferently as to birth, Jewish or otherwise, then we cannot ignore how continual liturgical use of Hebraic Scriptures which did not proceed upon such openness, has inculcated in the Church the very proneness to national, ethnic, particularist consciousness which does not belong there (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 330-1).

Nowhere is this problem seen more clearly than in the plight of Arab Christians in the Middle East, according to Cragg. Arab Christianity's 'faith-links are with the Hebraic in Isaiah, in the gospel and in Paul, while its heart-links are with the Arab soul in its case and cause about Israel' (Alive to God 1970, 48). The problem of exclusivity is particularly acute for Cragg because of his identification with Arab Muslims.

There is, for Arab Christians, an almost unbearable ambiguity in singing: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel'. . . . if [God's] 'visiting and redeeming his people' has to be read in terms of contemporary Palestinian history, how is he to be called 'blessed'? (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 334).

Cragg, along with many Christians in the Middle East, rejects a Jewish nationalism (Zionism) which claims divine right to a particular piece of land for a particular race of people, based primarily on certain texts from the Old Testament. 'This paradox of "Israel" as at once adversary and ancestor strains the Christian sense of Old Testament indebtedness to a point where its authority can no longer emotionally obtain' (Alive to God 1970, 49). This leaves Arab Christians 'politically bereaved of a spiritual history', not because

---

they have defected but rather because their history was disallowed by ‘decisions of its own trustees’ (Alive to God 1970, 49).

This tribalism and exclusivity is not just in the historical narratives but is perpetuated in the poetry of the Psalms as well. ‘For all their deep splendid quality of devotion and adoration, the Psalms breathe a very powerful and insistent identity-vigilance which has passed over into the ethos of the users’ (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 331).

‘Truly my soul waits upon God’, cries the psalmist in Psalm 62, but his mind moves at once to his enemies and his maledictions on them. . . . The danger is that this spirit of confrontation makes identity between a people’s foes and God’s, and all subsequent users liable to the same assumption, thus nourishing the very particularism of nations or sects or causes which the will to be Church must renounce (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 331).

Cragg did not have this problem earlier where he explained the Psalms quite traditionally.

Psalms, as poems of lament, complaint, fear, or dismay, will hardly seem to a Muslim what God could have supposedly revealed. But in their accumulative witness to the meaning of God in human life they communicate the ‘felt’ significance of the truth that God willed humans to understand (Call of the Minaret 1956, 280).

The theological perspective which was only just beginning in The Call of the Minaret (1956), took time to find full expression later.

5.1.2 Old Testament Messiah versus New Testament Christ

Traditionally in Christian interpretation, a major theme of continuity between Old and New Testaments has been the fulfilment of prophecy, particularly Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. This is certainly one way New Testament
writers looked at it. In his recent book, *The Lively Credentials of God*, Cragg traces Jewish historical understanding of the Messiah (pp. 52-70). He juxtaposes Jewish history with Old Testament writings of the same period. Relying on established scholarship he identifies how the concept of the Messiah changed over the course of history and how the Jewish understanding was not and indeed could not be in continuity with New Testament interpretation. His conclusion about messianic prophecies, though acknowledging New Testament claims to the contrary, is essentially one of discontinuity with the Old.

[Messiah] was . . . compromised by its confinement to one people. For, generous as its capacity for universality may intermittently have been, its particularity was always emphatic and . . . perpetuated by the paradox that its privacy was the eternal condition of its wider relevance (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 69).

Thus, according to Cragg, 'Given the unity of God; a divine Messiah who avails differently for the few from the many becomes a contradiction in terms' (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 69). But, perhaps even more important for him, the key quality of this messianic role of 'suffering prophethood' could not be easily seen except in hindsight (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 63). Thus, as we have noted earlier, Cragg concludes that Jesus could only be seen as the Messiah 'by first redrawing all the criteria' (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 72).

### 5.1.3 Old Testament ethics

In his earliest writings Cragg did not seem to struggle with the ethics of the Old Testament in quite the same way he did later. In *The Call of the Minaret* (1956) he used a traditional and positive argument. 'It must suffice to add one further
point about the nature of Biblical revelation — its honest realism in describing human weakness. Whether it be the story of Abraham or David or the portrait of the disciples, they are there, as Cromwell might have said, "warts and all" (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 280).

Later such an explanation would not cover the facts for Cragg. He came to see the Old Testament as not just pre-Christian, but rather as even sub-Christian in parts. In his autobiography Cragg recalls an early realisation which was an early step in his developing theology of the Old Testament.

'I have a message from God unto thee,' from Judges 3.20. I took it seriously to mean what it said about the preacher. I was shattered one day to discover what it meant in context. The 'message' was a dagger plunged by an assassin into the guts of Eglon, King of Moab, plunged so far that it could not be withdrawn (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 27).

The problem for Cragg, however, was more than just one of citing Scriptures out of context. For him much of the Old Testament offers little in the way of revelational value.

The episode of Samuel and Agag is horrific; the wanderings of the Ark, and sundries in royal chronicles, are trivial or inconsequential. . . . should they monopolise the ground of Scripture to the degree they do, when they thus exclude so much from liturgy and life richer and worthier, albeit non-canonical? (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 332).

Given that Cragg develops a concept of revelation and looks to see how Christian Scriptures fulfil or do not fulfil it, the above conclusion follows logically. If Cragg were able to see different parts of Christian Scriptures through different models, this problem, at least partially, could be solved.² For instance, if a model described as 'witnessing tradition' were applied to the Ark,

² Goldingay, Models for Scripture, 77-8.
Samuel, Agag and other Old Testament narratives, then they are seen as part of Israel's story, bad as well as good, which are important to Christians today because it was out of Israel that the Christ for the whole world came.

5.1.4 Ethics of a tribal covenant

For Cragg, the problem of ethics extends to more than just the violence and trivia of the Old Testament. He calls into question the covenant between God and Israel, again one of the traditional links between Old and New Testament. It is in his latest writing that Cragg makes this connection. 'What was by covenant, in some sense, inherently "holy" stayed falsely confident of perpetual inviolability, however "unholy" it became' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 61). Cragg earlier explained how 'the holy takes up, even usurps, the criteria of the ethical'. Noting 'how little there is in the Hebrew Scriptures about "conscience"', Cragg argues how easy it was for the holy (covenant with Israel is part of this) to 'become . . . unethical and be unaware of its metamorphosis into wrong' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 59).

For Cragg it was the prophets who corrected this. One continuity he does see between Old and New Testament is that the role of the prophets is carried over into the Christ. In the Old Testament their teaching is often a corrective to the proud and unthoughtful ethnic exclusivity of 'the chosen people of God'.

Oaths in that way imply a devaluing of ordinary speaking or promising. Then oaths can have the effect of absolving one of the need to be generally truthful. . . .There is then religious perjury.

It is this very deviousness, applied to covenant itself, which some prophets seem to have in mind when they accuse Israel of perverting their status to their own ends, and of dishonouring what it requires of them by using
Thus Cragg has come to struggle with the very concept of the covenant and God working through a particular people in order later to bring salvation to the whole world. This marks a theological change as it was not his original position in *The Call of the Minaret*. There he held that revelation could only be in the particular.

Inasmuch as Biblical revelation turns on events, and events in history are potentially innumerable, it proceeds by inclusive selection. The relation of God to all history is made clear in a particular history. A special history prepares and introduces that which illuminates and redeems all history (*Call of the Minaret*, 1956, 279).

Later the implications of his single-model theological framework finally began to be logically worked out in his writings. Israel’s ‘particular history’ came to pose problems for Cragg.

Might it then be right, as the Bible assumes, that we should take things Hebraic as a kind of divine pilot scheme with humanity, a sort of test-case in which issues ultimately relevant to all would be made explicit in sharp particularity?

If so, scholars and historians are faced with enormous problems concerning the scriptural documentation where the elements of that test-case are embodied. Indeed, the narration and biblical presentation of it constitute, in large part, the event itself. It is not simply what did happen, or may have happened, which signifies but that record and interpretation saw it so (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 53).

This raises the question of the degree to which the Old Testament can be seen as part of Christian Scriptures. This, too, is another area of difficulty for Cragg.
5.1.5 Old Testament as Scripture?

Cragg would say he accepts the Old Testament as Scripture but the question is, Does he? When he refers to Christian Scripture in his writing, particularly in comparisons with the Qur‘ān, he usually means only the New Testament (see below). Sometimes this is necessary as the chapter or topic on which he is writing is clearly the New Testament. But there are other times when this is not the case.

One good example is found in Cragg’s chapter in Ways of Reading the Bible. In his chapter ‘According to the Scriptures’, Cragg gives the context of the biblical quote. ‘When Paul ... used the phrase “according to the Scriptures”... He means it, as do the other passages, in a retrospective sense. The sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus are seen as fulfilling their anticipation in the prophets’ (‘According to the Scriptures’ 1981, 24). But then he moves immediately on to write, ‘Let us defer a study of the retrospective sense of this pivotal phrase — the sense which takes us to what is called the Old Testament, while we explore the other sense of the phrase as it must be applied to the New Testament per se’ (ibid.). His chapter then deals almost exclusively with the New Testament and a comparison of that to the Qur‘ān.

In our chapter on his general approach to Christian Scriptures, we noted that prophethood rather than prophecy is one key element in Cragg’s understanding of revelation (see 4.4.2.1). Paul’s reference can only logically be understood to mean that of prophecy; events and people which were predicted. It is this that gives credibility to what he is about to write. For Cragg, however, response and interaction are key to the true nature of revelation. Thus the
first century community of believers and the milieu out of which they made their response, is what is important for Cragg. The prophecies (particulars) are not. The particulars to which Paul refers are the real, historical identity and roots which come from one people and a Messiah through that people to the whole world. Because these particulars exclude the validity of other histories for Cragg, Paul’s plain meaning is left in abeyance as Cragg delves for qualities of revelation which are hospitable to people of other religious traditions.

A book entitled *Ways of Reading the Bible* implies different models of Christian Scriptures. Yet Cragg only offers one which is New Testament orientated. The Old Testament is missed because its contribution to Cragg’s definition of revelation is limited largely to parts of the Prophets and creation. Thus it is not surprising that Cragg clarifies ‘The Christian Scripture’ as the ‘New Testament’ and notes that it is exceptional because of two factors: ‘its tie-back into recovered history and its engagement with on-going community’ (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 110). Because of his view of revelation the place of the Old Testament becomes a body of material which Christian Scripture, the New Testament, interprets heavily as ‘a tie-back into recovered history’. It does not even make the grade of ‘Scripture’.

### 5.1.6 Old Testament as canon

We have already noted Cragg’s concern ‘whether the Church should ever have finalised its written criteria so early and so confidently’ (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 126) (see 4.3). We argued, however, that coming as it did before
theology developed into distinct streams, there was an inclusiveness about the
canon which could not have come in later church history.

Related to this problem, Cragg questions the role of the Old Testament when
he wonders if it should have been allowed 'to ride uncritically with future
calling?' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 330). Cragg sees the New Testament as
rightly 'future-orientated' but by linking the Old with it he has problems. 'To
be historically formative is one thing: to be truly future-oriented is another'
(ibid). Again we argue that this problem grows out of seeing Christian
Scriptures through the lens of a single model for interpretation, that is, its
contribution to a particular definition of revelation. Those parts which
embody and personify revelation are of value. Other bits are classified as
liabilities to our Christian heritage.

5.1.7 Cragg's handling of Old Testament difficulties

Many Christians share some or all of the above difficulties with the Old
Testament. In this Cragg is not unusual. The difference with him is in how
they are resolved. Cragg's approach is to not make clear theological statements
about anything. His theology needs to be gleaned through his usage. This is
even more true, if possible, for his treatment of the Old Testament. His
readers often are left with unresolved dilemmas. Goldingay notes that 'our
whole understanding of the Christian faith is determined by our attitude to the
Old Testament.'\footnote{John Goldingay, Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation, Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1981, 11, n. 1.} The Old Testament is part of Christian Scriptures and must
be dealt with one way or another. How it is done is revealing of a person's theology. Cragg's solution, though not spelled out clearly in any one place, is actually quite a radical one, the consequences of which have not been taken fully into account by him. This is particularly true given his own high view of the New Testament. Some of the implications to his assessments we noted above. He uses words such as 'unethical'. Concepts such as 'sub-Christian' are implied. These Old Testament problems need correcting according to Cragg. 'That correction was the liberation out of ethnic and covenantal priority, into inclusively human openness, of the Messianic reality' (What Decided Christianity 1989, 53). The question that needs to be asked is not if Cragg's solution is the best. Rather we seek to know its implications and consider possible alternative approaches.

5.2 Old Testament as old testament

In an introductory article meant to set the stage for dealing with questions of interpretation, George Tinker spells out a theological dilemma for native American Christians.

The imposition of the Hebrew Bible on native American Christians as an old testament functions in two dysfunctional ways in Native American communities. First, it functions to proscribe (explicitly or implicitly) the validity of Native American traditions. Second, it inherently prescribes replacing one's own history with someone else's history as a prerequisite for conversion.4

Tinker goes on to wonder if perhaps Native American traditions would better serve Native Americans than does the Hebrew Bible. In this scenario the Old

Testament would become an old testament which could be substituted for an old testament constituted of Native American traditions.

This is not a new idea. It has been overtly suggested as well as inferred by different authors for some years. Tinker's scenario is a post-modern solution to a question modernity brought about. In our comparison between Cragg and Wilfred Cantwell Smith we defined modernity and post-modernity, categorising Cragg as modern and Smith as post-modern (see 3.5.1). Simply stated, modernity looked for the universal, a common bond to bring together. This is Cragg's quest. Post-modernity recognised the hopelessness of that search and as a result accepts virtually anything, without value judgement. Still wearing modernity's spectacles as he does his theology, Cragg does not take the logical step Tinker does. But his theology is ready for it.

There is a clear sense in which Cragg, too, treats both the Old Testament and the Qur'an as old testaments to the New Testament.

New Testament experience of grace does not deny Sinai; rather it retrieves its moral, without its ethnic, intention by other means. We will be right to take Quranic law as the Islamic analogue to Sinai, and focus on its central intention to subdue the world to God, and to say that, as such, its chartering of humanity is a positive we should not neutralize because our theological predicates partially differ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 157).

Cragg has difficulties with the Old Testament but as long as it is not Scripture in the way the New Testament is, he can pick and choose from it according to his model of interpretation and so in practice it becomes an old testament. Similarly the Qur'an, though chronologically coming after the New Testament and not being part of Christian history, contains clues about the nature of
revelation which in the end point to Christ. It too becomes a testament for Christ.

The potential [of Muslims understanding Christ] is rich and there is precedent for it in the Christian reception of the Old Testament itself. No intelligent Christian will suppose, for example, that the gloom of Ecclesiastes, or the raw nationalism of such Psalms as 68 and 137, are compatible with the gospel. These . . . are within a revelation anticipatory of the fullness of Christ (‘Limits and Bridges’ 1979, 197).

This is borne out further in most of his writings where Cragg is highly critical of the Old Testament and yet often quotes from it, while with the Qur’an he seeks clues which might point its adherents toward a common ground with Christians. In the Qur’an his criticism is reserved for those who interpret it narrowly. Thus each become old testaments but for slightly different reasons.

This brings us again to Kraft’s point about those (including Muslims) who are ‘informationally BC but chronologically AD’ (see 2.1.3.2) where he accepts the fact that ‘God continues to save in the same way as in Old Testament times.’ Because Cragg’s mission is to the mind of Islam rather than to the individual Muslim and his salvation, he does not make the same connection Kraft does. People such as Jones are left to ponder if Cragg believes there can be salvation in Islam. Nevertheless, this is a logical outcome of Cragg’s approach to the Old Testament. Here too the Qur’an can become a source-book for the New Testament. This is indeed one way in which Cragg sees it.

The Quran, with its different sources of Christian disquiet, is subsequent to Christ. But when was truth essentially constituted by date? Place, as well as time, is an important factor if we are trying to understand the Quran’s significance. Seventh century (AD) Arabia was more like the Samaria of Elijah than the Jerusalem of Jesus, the Alexandria of Philo, or the Ephesus of John (‘Limits and Bridges’ 1979, 197).

---

5 Kraft, Christianity in Culture, 255.
For Cragg the Old Testament is similar in its strengths and weaknesses, and consequently similar in value to the Qur'an when it comes to preparing the reader for the true gospel, i.e., Christ and the responding, receiving community of believers, the Church. It should be added that Cragg clearly recognises differences between the Qur'an and the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures are based on a covenant with one people, while the Qur'an has a universally human calling under God.

Precisely because it transcends the 'ethnic' and sees prophets sent to a variety of peoples... Islam has no cause to perpetuate the Hebrew 'discrimination' of one land and one people, over against other lands and other peoples... Its horizons are, therefore, open for a general, ethical, hortatory discipline for the human tenancy of the good... sanctioned... by the revealed authority of government on behalf of God (Privilege of Man 1968, 104).

Yet redemption which is crucial to the New Testament is missing in the Qur'an. Thus the true nature of prophethood is not fully realised in Islam in the same way it is in Christianity where it is fulfilled in Christ. Because he looks beneath the externals to the nature of revelation, Cragg is free to acknowledge the Qur'an's strengths in a way that others sometimes are not. In this instance he notes its appeal to all humankind as opposed to the exclusivity of the Old Testament.

Yet the sense of the divine initiative, whether of covenant, or gospel, or law, is everywhere primary in these expressions of religion. The significance of revelation is that it meets and satisfies the expectancies, however varied, with which men have longed for it. Once given and established, whether in Moses, or Jesus, or Muhammad, in Torah, Gospel and Qur'an, it continues to direct and mould the expectations of its peoples. Systems of faith are the continuities of what once began (Christian and Other Religion 1977, 36-7).
It is not just the Qur'an which should be considered as old testament. Cragg calls for a broad, inclusive approach which looks for Christ in all the world.

Should we look for outlines of what Christhood means only in Hebraic sources? Joseph and Jonah, for example, have served well as partial types. Are there none in the literature of Asia? ... May these find no place in the spiritual stock-in-trade of a church meant for universal mankind and no echo in its liturgy? (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986, 333).

There is a wealth, as we have insisted, about all peoplehood, all tribal tenancy of territory, all corporate sense of memory and history. There have been exoduses and entries in all directions, the same sagas of mobile identities across the earth and down the centuries (*Lively Credentials of God* 1995, 52).

In summary, Cragg's view of the nature of revelation leads to a more serious consideration of the Qur'an than many Christians have historically had. It also raises severe questions about the Old Testament. The practical outworking of this is that the Old Testament becomes old testament, one of many potential source books for the New Testament. The Old Testament has its weaknesses, for example, a covenantal theology which leads to ethnic exclusivity, as does the Qur'an which is 'chronologically AD but informationally BC' in that it does not overtly acknowledge the need for redemption. In digging beneath the surface, Cragg notes that the Qur'an, and not just the Old Testament, contain clear pointers as to the true nature of redemption and so can be reckoned on a more or less equal footing in their revelatory value.

### 5.3 An Alternative Approach

The question needs to be asked if there is another way, within Cragg's theology, to interpret the Old Testament. A major problem Cragg faces is his own strong acceptance of the New Testament and the decisions of the Church regarding
canon. That leaves him at odds with both when it comes to the Old Testament. Any suggested alternatives should be consistent with Cragg’s general theological positions.

First, a heavy reliance on the Old Testament by Christian groups does not necessarily lead to unbridled ethnicity. David Barrett, in his study of numerous indigenous African Christian groups, notes their heavy usage of the Old Testament in defining their religious identity, so much so that in some cases they are hard to identify with world-wide Christianity. He also notes, however, that over a sixty to seventy year time-period, if they had translated Scriptures, the groups became measurably more ‘orthodox’. The Old Testament served a function in the tribes for a while but in time its use became more balanced.

We have already noted that by seeing Christian Scriptures only through their contribution to a particular definition of revelation Cragg has run into unnecessary difficulties and inconsistencies. There are other ways of understanding this revelation. One is fundamentalism which rigidly holds to forms of Christian Scriptures as the revealed Word of God. One problem with this is that it stretches credulity and is harsh to those of other beliefs. It was against such thinking from his early upbringing that Cragg reacted. A second is progressive revelation which was popular for some years amongst British evangelicals. It enabled them to explain relationships between the Old and New Testaments without the fundamentalism which had become prevalent.

in America. Although Cragg never uses the term, there are aspects of his interpretation which fit this approach. The problem with progressive revelation, as we have seen also in Cragg's handling of the Old Testament, is that it does not take Christian Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, as a whole. Goldingay suggests that it becomes altogether too easy simply to drop parts of the Old Testament because they have been superseded or to see chronologically earlier statements about, for instance, the character of God, to be inferior to later ones. Cragg, in fact, does both. We have noted the difficulties with this.

The concept of 'accommodation' offers a third alternative understanding of revelation. 'God accommodates the revelation of the truth to the limitations of those to whom it is given.' This theological concept which dates back to the early Church Fathers, provides an approach to Christian Scriptures which might have fewer inconsistencies for Cragg. Christian Scriptures can be taken as a whole. In the next chapter on the New Testament, Cragg's theology of the New Testament is left unscathed by New Testament criticism. He continues to hold a high view. There he argues that the New Testament must be taken as a whole because 'the whole is rooted in real events' and 'it belongs integrally with the whole shape of Jesus' teaching' (*Privilege of Man* 1968, 134). This is no less true for the Old Testament, and yet he does not apply this principle there. We argue that he would have a more consistent theology if he accepted this point and looked for other ways, like 'accommodation', for handling Old Testament problems.

---

It is also important, however, to recognise that revelation is not the only 'model' which we use to understand Christian Scriptures. If it is, there are difficulties with understanding why large parts of the Old Testament are in the Bible. Cragg has noted this. Thus, we argue, the use of different 'models' such as witnessing tradition, inspired word, authoritative canon, as well as revelation should be part of interpretation of Christian Scriptures.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ These are the four basic models Goldingay develops in the Models for Scripture.

The strengths of Cragg’s single-model approach of revelation become more apparent once he moves out of the Old Testament. In his treatment of the New Testament, not only does Cragg engage meaningfully with Islam, but in the process his theology holds the New Testament together in a reasonably logical and consistent manner. This was not as true for the Old Testament. Yet this consistency in his approach to the New Testament does not lie totally at ease within the bounds of traditional Protestant interpretation, a category into which both adherents and scholars alike have placed Cragg.¹

Our analysis of Cragg’s handling of the New Testament is in two chapters and is structured largely around what we have identified as two basic interpretative premises, suffering prophethood as part of revelation and, secondly, ‘hospitality’ of the Gospel. This chapter deals with ‘suffering’ but begins with a summary of his approach to New Testament criticism and his view of the unity of the New Testament. We then again take up his understanding of the nature of revelation, as we now see it in another light in his handling of the New Testament. Chapter seven analyses Cragg’s usage of the theme of ‘hospitality’ and how this applies to the relationship between Christianity and Islam.

¹ For instance Jones defines Cragg as ‘an evangelical Englishman’ in his thesis and in his article, ‘Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Kenneth Cragg on Islam’, 105.
It should be added that though Cragg has various chapters and explanations on the New Testament, what we present has been gleaned from a spectrum of his works. The intent of Cragg's writing is not to develop a theology of interpretation for Christian Scriptures. Rather it is to engage with other faiths, particularly Islam, in a theology of cross-reference. Thus, as we have shown before, his approach to Christian Scriptures is not always consciously developed. This continues to be true for the New Testament.

6.1 General Approaches to the New Testament

6.1.1 New Testament criticism

Given the nature of Islam's Qur'an, the issue of the critical method for approaching Christian Scriptures becomes important. Cragg does deal with it. His first real attempt was in *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985). He states the obvious puzzles a Muslim has in coming to the New Testament.

Point to these Scriptures and say: 'What a way to leave revelation!' — so open to necessary scholarship, so linked into recording with human memory, so involved in human custody and serving faith through its text only by becoming a text through the faith it served. The New Testament... sets many potential — but in no way insurmountable — puzzles for the Muslim who comes to it (75).

Although Cragg did not come to grips with issues of New Testament criticism until relatively late, nevertheless, there are indications of a fairly conservative position in earlier writing from which he does not later deviate. For example, chapter four in *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985) (just quoted) and chapter three in

---

1 *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985) and *What Decided Christianity* (1989) represented my own effort to accept the obvious — and the less obvious — liabilities of Christian scholarship about
What Decided Christianity (1989) quite specifically deal with New Testament criticism. But we can see the basis of these in The Privilege of Man (1968).

Here Cragg acknowledges but rejects two common but very different approaches to the New Testament. First he rejects the belief that the historicity of events recorded in the New Testament is immaterial (and probably highly inaccurate) but it is the interpretation and the faith of the community of believers which matters. 'Two elements in this faith about God in Christ must be carefully recollected — the one that the whole is rooted in real events, the other that it belongs integrally with the whole shape of Jesus' teaching' (Privilege of Man 1968, 134).

One expression of a high scepticism of New Testament events was Albert Schweitzer's 'quest for the historical Jesus'. Cragg rejects this. 'We must not take a view of Jesus' passion, as for example Schweitzer did, which would relate it to eschatological or other concepts inferior to the actual practice of his ministry' (Privilege of Man 1968, 135).

The other extreme which Cragg rejects was a literalist interpretation that holds blindly to 'facts' which were never intended to be understood in that way by New Testament writers. This is consistent with his personal pilgrimage away from a very conservative theology of the Bible. This has not, however, detracted from his conviction of the historicity of events in the New Testament, even if they were highly interpreted by the writers.

---

Christian faith' (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 216).

3 See the chapter 6, 'Grace and Sonship: The Crisis of Christian Humanity,' The Privilege of Man, 125-149.
The emphasis on historicity as evidenced in the above quotes continues to be strong in later writings. After Cragg grappled with the hard insights of New Testament criticism there is little evidence of change in his approach to the New Testament. For instance in *What Decided Christianity* Cragg firmly rejects ‘schools’ of New Testament criticism which are either ‘oddly pessimistic ... as to what we can really know of Jesus’ (*What Decided Christianity* 1989, 137) or are impacted by philosophies of existentialism where ‘the fact of faith rather than the facts of history determines Christianity’ (ibid., 138). Similarly, several times in Cragg’s later writings he continues to be critical of Albert Schweitzer and his successors in their quest for the historical Jesus behind the documents of the New Testament. For Cragg searching for Jesus behind the New Testament is not a valid approach. Jesus cannot be known except through the New Testament and the interactive quality of revelation makes this knowing of him both valid and real. This is a remarkably similar position to that of 1968, particularly given that he was grappling with textual issues he had not tried to assimilate coherently prior to that.

It can be argued that Cragg’s engagement with Islam has at least partially influenced both his acceptance of the New and his rejection of the Old Testaments. The Old Testament, because of its exclusive character in Jewish identity, became increasingly less applicable to redemptive history and all of humankind in Cragg’s theology. Cragg’s inability to accept one culture as God’s way of working from the particular to the universal was only exacerbated by the Arab-Israeli problem. The New Testament, on the other hand, had a

---

different status for Cragg. Its universal message of Christ for all the world has that vitally important inclusiveness. The only way to know Christ, who is revelation par excellence for Cragg, is through the New Testament. It could also be argued that Muslims' own high view of Scriptures engages Cragg on a level of debate which means that he does not question his own Scriptures as scholarship does when it assumes an agnostic's stance in order to view the text objectively.

It is also important, however, to recognise that Cragg acknowledges the necessity of critical methods. 'Jesus has to be “recovered” from his own legatees whom we can only trust distrustfully' (What Decided Christianity 1989, 133).

For other witnesses there are none. To have Jesus in any measure without them we lack not only the story but the teaching also. . . .This makes for an odd situation in that the sources have to be trusted to a degree in order to be corrected to a satisfaction. The vicissitudes of Gospel formation have to be probed in order, if possible, to sift the wheat from the chaff by the winnowing wisdom of the scholars (Ibid., 133).

Nevertheless, most of Cragg’s writing on New Testament criticism highlights its shortcomings when it is conducted in a spirit of agnosticism, as many scholars believe it needs to be.

Those who think otherwise [than the Gospels’ authentic reporting] are left arguing their scepticism from the very sources they distrust. The wide (some would say chronic) diversity of interpretation to which the Synoptic Gospels have been subject is witness to how far ‘the testimony of Jesus is a trust of study’ (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 116).5

Cragg argues that different faith positions regarding the text lead to different outcomes when these scientific methods are applied. He concludes that ‘a

---

5 As is the case in this quote Cragg often uses quotation marks for no identifiable reason.
critic's prejudice tends to determine his analyses' (What Decided Christianity 1989, 134).

Cragg acknowledges the bias of faith from which New Testament writers write and is also practical in accepting that it is now impossible to recover the type of history that those who search for the historical Jesus, for instance, may be looking for. Yet for Cragg this does not take away from the validity of the Gospels. 'We only have a mediated Jesus but with a confidence that the media, even with their manifest frailties in process, were congenial to his mind' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 116). The Christ was Jesus and events of his life are rooted in 'facts' of history, even though they may be interpreted facts.

His Aramaic sounds and syllables are translated for us and have come ... through hazardous processes to reach the Greek Testament and ourselves beyond it. The Synoptics cite, we believe, as closely as possible. For that was their ambition and the intention of the processes on which they relied. We have confidence that, reading the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and so much else, we are hearing the authentic Jesus of Nazareth (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 117).

His overall view is summarised in no better way than in an illustration he makes in response to John Bowden which defends the New Testament and its Christ.

The tree is one, and grows from and because of its roots. But those roots necessarily grow also with the growth above ground. As the derivative above enlarges and extends so, commensurately, the source below deepens and solidifies. In a comparable sense the documentation of Jesus takes off from its roots in his story but lets them partake in the life of what they grew into. To have this tree metaphor, and to have it in proper discipline, is to understand the relation between story and faith, between history and theology, obtaining in all the Gospels (What Decided Christianity 1989, 72).

All this has profound implications for Cragg's engagement with Islam. 'What a way to leave revelation' (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 75) he echoes but moves rapidly from the obvious problems of the text to his theology of the nature of
revelation. He does acknowledge Muslims’ problems with even the very nature of the critical method (*What Decided Christianity* 1989, 133). But in at least one place he seeks to put it in a positive light, where he explains to the educated Muslim laypeople some of the benefits of the critical method and the reasons why Christian scholarship has been engaged in it.⁶ Though acknowledging that he has benefited from New Testament criticism himself, Cragg has not generally used it. Others too have noted this.

Cragg nowhere directly tackles this crux of New Testament interpretation, though it was well-known long before he wrote *The Christian and Other Religion*. His attitude to Biblical criticism seems to be to ignore its alleged results while defending its legitimacy as method.⁷

### 6.1.2 Unity of the New Testament

From early on, Cragg has held to the essential unity of the New Testament, not seeing a different theology between the Gospels and the Epistles. In his earliest writings he notes, ‘The evangel recorded in the Gospels is experienced in the Epistles. It is out of that experience, analyzed and elucidated in the Epistles, that the Gospel records were written. Herein is the essential unity of the New Testament’ (*Call of the Minaret*, 1956, 278).

He has not essentially changed in his later writing. Cragg rejects the conclusions of scholars who see a different theology between the Epistles and the Gospels and who argue that Jesus did not anticipate the church (*Privilege*

---


⁷ Lamb, ‘Call to Retrieval,’ 108. In his book *The Call to Retrieval* (69-70) Lamb distances himself from this strong statement by instead writing, ‘some have thought that his attitude . . .’ and he cites P. Edmonds, ‘Review of *Paul and Peter,*’ *Heythrop Journal* 23 (1982), 188.
of Man 1968, 126-7). He rejects the view that Paul developed a theology which was not intended in the Gospels and that it was only from him that Christology came (What Decided Christianity 1989, 91-2). Cragg is clear in his belief that there are not two separate theologies represented between Gospel writers and the Epistles.

What the Gospels were getting into focus as to Christhood according to Jesus the Epistles were applying to the character of the community. The two tasks make the two literatures, interdependent but distinctive. It is in the world of the Epistles that the Gospels come to birth: it is from the world of the Gospel that the Epistles teach the churches (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 92).

On the surface it is somewhat surprising that Cragg holds so easily and uncritically to this essential unity without going into it in greater detail, particularly given the relative ease with which he subjugates the value of much of the Old Testament. On the other hand if one considers that his approach to the New Testament (and Old Testament) is often done in reference to Islam, such an acceptance of unity is not surprising. Critical methods have been little applied to the Qur’ân, partly because the historical context is that much more hidden than that of the New Testament, and partly because of extreme theological resistance on the part of Muslims. We have noted that Cragg to some degree accepts the Qur’ân in this way (see 2.3). He does the same for the New Testament. Thus one can argue that there is a fairness in Cragg not using critical methods for either the Qur’ân or the Bible. Secondly, it is not the result of biblical criticism that leaves Cragg struggling with valuing much of the Old Testament. Rather it is the exclusive nature of the Old Testament which seems to exclude other peoples of the world and particularly Muslims. The antidote for this is the ‘hospitality’ of the New Testament (see Ch. 7). Thus there is a consistency here as well.
6.1.3 The Epistles and Gospels as interactive revelation

It is around the Epistles that Cragg develops his theology for interpreting the New Testament, the Old Testament and even his approach to Islam.

Engagement with Islam was key to his developing an understanding of the Epistles as Scripture. 'I would never have felt the need to justify the Epistles except for Islam.' Islam emphasises the otherness of revelation in its Qur'an. It comes from God and it is infallible. For Cragg the Christian Scriptures which carry revelation are not. They were not intended that way in their original authorship and that should not be put on them now. 'It is hard to see how the New Testament could ever have been mistaken by infallibilizers or seduced by them. Its Gospels and Epistles are so bonded into event-experience' (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 32).

This is undoubtedly a response to those whose thinking he understands from his conservative upbringing. Such references, however, are surprisingly infrequent in his writings, possibly out of respectful deference to Christians with different beliefs. More probably, however, the issue for Cragg is not so much what Christian Scriptures are not but rather what they are. Such a statement about infallibility begs the question of what is meant by Scriptures being 'infallible'. Infallible in what: exact wording, historical accuracy, intent? Without definition 'infallible' is too imprecise a term to critique. Goldingay considers the word 'infallible' as one possible model for understanding Christian Scriptures. He understands it can have use but to a limited extent.

8 Interview with Cragg, Oxford, 26 August, 1994. Further clarification and references to written
It is as promise that the word of God is infallible: It does not fail to come true and thus it does not deceive. . . . In scripture, then, talk of the infallibility of the word of God implies a claim about its truth, not in the sense of factual correctness, since it is likely to be a statement that is not as present factually correct, but in the sense of its reliability and effectiveness.

To take this a step further, according to Cragg revelation always involves ‘risk’ on the part of God in that it is dependent on response. We cannot say that Cragg holds to infallible revelation. The positive nature of that ‘event–experience’ as revelation is Cragg’s thrust. For Cragg event-experience is most evident in the Epistles which is where he develops his theology for interpretation.

The Epistles in the New Testament are the clearest evidence that Biblical revelation cooperates with human experience in order to complete and fulfill itself. . . . It is the offer of a relationship. . . . Thus what it means cannot be expressed out of connection with its reception (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 277).

As noted above, Cragg credits Islam with motivating him to deal with the nature of the Epistles as Scripture. ‘How, the Muslim is moved to ask, can apostolic correspondence [the Epistles] . . . constitute “revelation”? For “revelation” only “comes down” from heaven, and is never horizontal, man to man’ (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 32).

The answer is that divine inspiration in them is set within the actual nurture of the nascent church into its own meaning via the counsel and mind of apostolic leadership. . . . Such literature cannot be read as a slavish blueprint which needs and awaits no intelligence. New Testament authority is not some telephone directory with listings which engage no thought and need no circumspection. . . . The Christian scriptures are not documents which give themselves to readers asking merely to be told and having no mind for mental travail (ibid., 32).

work were obtained in a second interview, Oxford, 15 July, 1995.
Cragg can be quite traditional in the application of the above as evidenced below where he tries to explain the Epistles in simple terms to inquiring Muslims.

The [Epistles]... must be read and taken as affording precedents which can be translated for ongoing guidance elsewhere.... This is the way the Epistles work as Scripture. Their immediacy in no way disserves their universality, given the active acceptance of their quality (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 94).

Putting it in the order in which Cragg has theologically organised, the receiving of the revelation, demonstrated in the Epistles, prompts the telling of the Jesus-story.

The Jesus-story is received by faith as the Christ-event: that reception inspires the telling of the story.... Both demand a readership which appreciates its character as what happened and what what happened meant, and neither without the other (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 32).

In all this Cragg’s emphasis is primarily on community and not the individual writers. For Cragg the evidence of the Epistles is that it is the community of believers which receives and interprets revelation which gives interpretative birth to the Jesus-story of the Gospels.

Their pens are not ‘individual’, but broadly moved by the perspectives of community. For it was on communal memory they had to draw as well as communal perceptions they were minded to express. The Gospels are, therefore, at once documents of history and of faith. It has to be appreciated that this makes for a subtle quality of ‘fact’ about them (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 113).

Perhaps Cragg has been unduly influenced by the Muslim concept of Ijmā’ (consensus) here. His perspective seems to follow someone like A. M. Hunter. ‘The Christian faith did not spring from the teeming brain of a single man of genius. The church and the faith existed before, and alongside of Paul.’

---

Nevertheless even Hunter recognises Paul's 'highly original and seminal mind.'\textsuperscript{10} Paul did not individually blaze the trail for the formation of Christianity, but neither were his writings based on consensus. While Cragg's view may have an appeal in a poetic or romantic sense it is not fully grounded in reality. The individual writer must figure more prominently in the New Testament than Cragg allows. For instance in the Pauline Epistles, the participativeness of revelation is more through the individual Paul than through community. His personality is clearly visible in his writing and does much to shape the community's response. Equally the risk of God letting his revelation be mediated is more through an individual, Paul in the case of the Epistles, than through community. The community decides which of Paul's writings to accept (canon), but it is Paul who decided what to write in them.

Finally, Cragg's special interest in the Gospel of John deserves mention. It is a subject he takes up in several of his writings. In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, John's interpretative character is one which meshes well with his view of the nature of revelation. Nevertheless Cragg finds it the most demanding of the Gospels to interpret to Islam because 'it involves and intensifies those issues about revelation through personality' \textit{(Jesus and the Muslim} 1985, 234).

First, Cragg sees the Fourth Gospel as "re-presenting" the Synoptic Jesus with a radical initiative of interpretation' \textit{(Lively Credentials of God} 1995, 117). With the possible exception of the word 'radical' this is quite a traditional Protestant

approach. Thus the Gospel of John, for Cragg, then becomes the embodiment of received revelation:

Holding the Synoptics and John together — as we must, since there is deep reason in their juncture — we are in the way of what the Incarnation holds, namely the Jesus who 'speaks' where men listen on the hillsides and 'means' as the eternal referent of all he was, from 'the bosom of the Father' (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 118).

To a certain extent, what is fully true for John is also true for all four Gospels. The response is part of the revelation of God incarnate, Jesus Christ. 'The Christian Gospels do not commend their credentials to sleeping partners. “Lively oracles of God” require lively readers whose liveliness resorts with queries, doubts, debate and scrutiny — all the concomitants of faith' (To Meet and to Greet 1992, 32).

6.1.4 Revelation and Acts as non-Epistles and non-Gospels

If one could take a single example in the Bible that could be said to be of a similar nature to the Qur'an in terms of God-dictated revelation, it would be the book of Revelation, a vision from God reportedly being accurately copied by the writer. This does not fit Cragg's model of revelation, however, and thus is only briefly dealt with in his writings.

With respect to authorship, Cragg accepts that the difference in language between Revelation and the Gospel of John is an indication that they were not written by the same person. As we have seen earlier Cragg holds to a commonly accepted view that authorship in the New Testament is sometimes attributed to Apostles who may not have written them. In fact, he uses the
Muslim example of isnād (chain of transmission) for their authentication process for the hadīth (traditions) to explain it (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 118). The intent was to recognise the true authority of the book as falling within the authority of the Apostles' teaching.

As far as interpretation is concerned, Cragg applies his own understanding of revelation to the book of Revelation.

It is pre-eminently in the Book of Revelation that the author places himself firmly in the heart of the scene and the scene squarely in his personal travail. He belongs in the long tradition of apocalyptic visionaries who spelled out their meaning in coded symbols and allusions suited to the sufferings and perils of a persecuted and harried Church. His message is known for and from the actualities of tribulation and tells itself in the idiom of defiant hope. Here imagery both interprets and informs experience (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 123).

It is community (the church) and response (the author 'firmly in the heart of the scene') that is important for Cragg in his understanding of the nature of revelation, not the visions which were reported to have come from God.

It is impossible to say the extent to which Cragg's interpretation of the book of Revelation is the product of his engagement with Islam. The 'tradition of apocalyptic visionaries', 'coded symbols', etc. is a common though not necessarily the most widely accepted Christian interpretation for content for the book of Revelation. Also other theologians and exegetes do not use

11 There is not a general agreement on how Revelation should be interpreted today. The idea of 'coded' symbols, however implies a formal 'key' to uncode. A minority would hold to that. A common type of interpretation sees Revelation as containing symbols more easily understood by first and second century Christians than they are today. It would also read some theological significance into the vision. See the now somewhat dated standard work of G. R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, New Century Bible, London: Oliphants, 1974. For a similar perspective but more modern see, Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Book of Revelation,' Anchor Bible, Vol. 5, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 694-708; J. Ramsey Michaels, Interpreting the Book of Revelation, Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker, 1992.
Revelation to the same extent as most other parts of the New Testament. Cragg’s interpretation falls well within the traditional Protestant understanding both in terms of content and the amount Revelation is quoted/used.

Cragg deals with the book of Acts more thoroughly than Revelation. He uncritically accepts Lucan authorship. Cragg is aware of issues of interpretation in Acts. About the history and particularly the sermons of Acts he writes that ‘all passes its light through prisms of comprehension, retrospect, and interpretation’ (Lively Credentials of God 1995, 95). But with this caution, he seems to take the book at face value. He sees the purpose of Acts in the stated outline from chapter 1:8 of the church spreading from first Jerusalem to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. He relies on it as a source of information about the early church. ‘Joining Gospels and Epistles together, and recording some history of events within their common time, stands Acts of the Apostles’ (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 107).

Further in Jesus and the Muslim he gives quite extensive coverage to the overall structure and theme of the book. His particular emphasis on the events and speeches which authenticated the spreading of the Gospel outside the Jewish community is not surprising, given his desire to explain Acts to Muslims. Special explanation is made of Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch and Peter’s vision of the sheet let down from heaven. As a point of common ground with Muslims, Cragg draws parallels between Islam’s rejection of idolatry and Paul’s Areopagus Address and his conflict with the idol makers of the goddess Diana in Ephesus. On the whole Cragg provides
few surprises from the book of Acts for his readers. He holds to an understanding of authorship and purpose of the book which is quite common. He uses its historical information to inform his understanding of other parts of the New Testament. He often quotes Acts, as he does not Revelation.

There is, however, one nuance of interpretation which is worth mentioning. Cragg reflects with the hypothetical Muslim reader of the New Testament, the reason why so much is left out of Acts. 'Why are so many of the acts of the Apostles left out? Why does it end as it does without so much as reporting on the deaths of Paul or Peter?' (Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 114). Although a common question, Cragg’s particular interpretative slant is to see this as yet another demonstration of the response quality to revelation. Orthodoxy is not closed and sealed as a single interpretation from the early church once the canon of Christian Scriptures is decided. Rather it is open-ended, and revelation can only be revelation as that response continues (What Decided Christianity 1989, 141).

6.2 Implications for Cragg’s New Testament Theology

Traditional Protestants would have little quarrel with Cragg’s high view of the New Testament and its interpretation. Yet Cragg’s approach diverges from the traditional in his heavy emphasis on the single theological strand which constantly comes back to the true nature of revelation. This, we have seen, he has developed as his common ground for dialogue with Islam. There are
consequences for his particular emphases. These consequences move Cragg out of a ‘traditional Protestant’ category.

6.2.1 Prophethood

Although Cragg was one of the first to consider a comparison between Jesus and the Qur’ān instead of the Bible and the Qur’ān, he also rejected a superficial understanding of such an interpretation. Instead, for Cragg, it is around the true nature of revelation and prophethood that he builds his theology and interpretation of the New Testament. Thus he can say,

This New Testament awareness of truth in Jesus and not simply from him, of ‘the Word’ that he is rather than the words that he brings, not only gives rise to the later theology: it is central to the Gospel narrative. It needs to be understood for what it is, given the different concept of ‘prophethood’ upon which Islam and the Qur’ān proceed (emphasis original; Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 129).

The true nature of revelation underlies the true nature of prophethood. Above we demonstrated Gragg’s premise of the interactive nature of true revelation. Cragg also accepts that this revelation comes through certain individuals who are prophets of God. Revelation for them, too, is interactive but it invariably involves suffering because it always stands against innate human perversity.

Christian theology in the New Testament saw ‘sentness’ of the messengers on behalf of God as real proof of the human dignity. It saw their history as the measure of human perversity. On both counts, it read the clue to divine sovereignty. The dignity could only be retrieved where the perversity was overcome. It took the drama of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ as the symbol of what wrong does to truth and what grace does with wrong and of how God is known to us in both dimensions. Or in Quranic language theology believed that there it was learning ‘to esteem God His own right esteeming’ (Returning to Mount Hira’ 1994, 73).
Jesus Christ, God incarnate, is the perfect prophet, according to Cragg. It is on this single strand of prophethood which Cragg builds his Christology. 'We can say that Christian theology read Christology from prophethood because it saw prophethood in suffering as the clue to Christology' (Returning to Mount Hira' 1994, 72).

Traditional Protestant theology also clearly recognises the role of Jesus as prophet. It also stresses, however, two other quite distinct roles: priest and king. Cragg does not. Instead he ties the priestly role of Jesus the Christ back into prophethood in a somewhat unusual way and basically ignores the glorification of Jesus or his kingly aspect. This emphasis follows logically from a single-model, revelation approach to Scripture, a model he has adopted, partly at least, to have a common ground for discussion with Islam. The emphasis on revelation as suffering prophethood masks other aspects of who Christ is in Christian theology, almost to the point of exclusion.

6.2.2 Priest and King

For Cragg the priestly identity of Jesus has come to be intrinsically linked to the prophet's role. In this area, one can see a clear progression of a developing theology over the years of his writing. In his earliest work, his approach is conservative.

He endured the Cross and suffered the contradiction of sinners against Himself with forgivingness. . . . Only by bearing does the redeemer bear away the sin of the world. The words from the Cross . . . proclaim the Cross as a supreme deed of redemptive sacrifice. Truly 'with his stripes we are healed.' Here we find a quality of love that makes an end of evil because it freely takes all its consequences upon itself (Call of the Minaret, 1956, 299).
Still there are signs of a later theology in his emphasis on suffering and the phrase ‘contradiction of sinners’ which has a ring of dialogue with Islam about it. This is how Cragg elsewhere refers to the opposition the Prophet faced in Mecca. A decade later we can see further developments in his theology. Cragg offers a comprehensive exegesis of the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 where he sees the cross but, we argue, not the meaning of the crucifixion (see 8.3.1). ‘There stands then a sort of cross at the heart of the story. The capacity to love is the capacity to bear, and so, in turn, the capacity to suffer’ (Privilege of Man 1968, 141).12

Seventeen years later there is still further development where suffering prophethood is the priestly function of Christ.

Prophethood was God’s agency inside human history. Suffering was inherent in it. Suffering could be taken redemptively and be properly associated with God Himself, seeing that prophethood and all it entailed was His devising (Returning to Mount Hira’ 1994, 72).

The continuity from Old Testament sacrifice to the cross as substitutionary atonement is an interpretation Cragg actually rejects. Rather, he sees the link as a tie-back to the suffering prophets who called Israel away from an exclusive ethnic identity to an internal and more universal faith.

The ‘lamb’ language had truer resonance when it derived from the precedent of the suffering prophets, Jeremiah most of all. They had endured ‘the contradiction of sinners against themselves,’ the tragic role of truthbearers in a hostile society (What Decided Christianity 1989, 35).

In making this interpretation Cragg feels the need to explain the New Testament references which easily lend themselves to the concept of a

---

12 In our later full discussion of this parable we note Bailey’s indebtedness to Cragg for first seeing the cross in the parable. We argue that given that interpretation, however, Bailey is more
substitutionary atonement. He describes them as 'metaphors of oblation borrowed to describe [Jesus] from the sheepfolds that fed the Temple altars.' Thus it was 'instinctive for the disciples to tell of him in the same idiom of sacrifice and innocence for sin' (What Decided Christianity 1989, 35).

The question needs to be asked, why Cragg has opted for an individual interpretation of suffering in prophethood and its relation to revelation. Respectful engagement with another faith can lead to a blurring of distinctives. Jones touched on this issue peripherally when he asked the question if Cragg believed there to be salvation in Islam. Cragg countered with an article questioning Jones's use of the word 'salvation' ('Prepositions and Salvation' 1993). Below we examine if, in fact, Cragg has blurred those distinctives. The key lies in his Christology.

Cragg's emphasis on prophethood, the key to Muslim understanding of how God communicates to the world, is because of his engagement with Islam. The same is true for the move from that to his arguments for the reality and necessity of 'vicarious suffering' in true prophethood which can benefit others. Cragg looks for this in Islam and finds the concept present in different places. He concludes that 'there is suffering which has to be vicariously "taken" and its inflicters forgiven' (emphasis original; Jesus and the Muslim 1985, 179). He logically argues this position in Returning to Mount Hira', as a basis for bringing Muslims closer to Christians.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, the 'bundle of life' means inexorably that 'sin' here is 'suffering' there. What is committed by these is endured by those and we cannot exempt ourselves from these connections.

logically consistent than is Cragg.

13 'Islam as a Way of Salvation' 1992, 105-120.
Consequences fall on those who had no part in the deeds. They are incurred as tragedy, exploitation, injustice and zuilm. The world being this way, it is idle to speak of there being 'no burden bearers with any burden [of evil] but their own doing'. In casual or corporate involvement in wrong there is vicarious guilt, in its harsh incidence vicarious distress (Returning to Mount Hira' 1994, 122).

So there is vicarious redemption, according to Cragg.

This quality of Islamic faith . . . has often been urged to counter the Christian sense of things vicarious. . . . The dictum that 'no burden-bearer bears the burden of another' cannot apply in what personal guilt entails on others, though guilt and retribution remain the doer's alone. There are consequences. These are rarely confined to the guilty parties. When consequences are taken forgivingly situations can be redeemed and the evildoers also, through repentance and a making new of the self. . . . There are no forgiven without the forgiving and suffering for another is the clue to grace. In that sense, vicarious redemption happens every day and only by means of it is life retrieved from vengeance, hatred and festering enmity (Returning to Mount Hira' 1994, 121-2).

Thus, according to Cragg, the priestly role of Jesus is virtually indistinguishable from his true prophetic role. To stop the march of evil, this vicarious suffering must be assumed by true believers who are followers of Jesus. Cragg has written much on this subject and it would take more space than we have to do it justice. Our point here is to present the theological consequences of Cragg's interpretative position. Vicarious suffering prophethood offers a continuity between Christianity, Islam and the Old Testament and is seen in Jesus on the cross in its perfection. This has the effect of lessening one strong traditional Protestant understanding of the priestly role of Jesus and has come to take the place of a traditional (substitutionary) understanding of the atonement for Cragg.

Finally, although Cragg does mention the kingship of Christ, Jesus' exaltation plays no major role in his interpretation of Christian Scriptures. Lamb has
noted that Cragg writes very little about the resurrection, instead choosing to focus on the suffering of the cross.\(^{14}\)

Cragg writes little about the Kingdom of God which features prominently in Matthew and some of the parables of Jesus. His rejection of ethnicity in the Old Testament and State in Islam are undoubtedly partially responsible for this response. Kingship implies a dominion and an exclusivity. Some are part of it and some are not. Cragg's whole approach to Jesus as Christ moves him away from anything that might be seen as triumphalism. Again his theology of suffering prophethood takes away from another traditional aspect of the Christian faith.

### 6.3 Summary

Suffering is the key interpretative factor for Cragg when it comes to understanding the Christ of the New Testament. We use the word 'suffering' instead of the cross intentionally. This is because Cragg's emphases of meaning about the cross have shades of difference from what traditionally has been emphasised in orthodox Christianity. He steps out of traditional Protestant emphases on the meaning of the cross in two areas. The first we have covered and the second comes in Chapter 7. The cross for Cragg is a key to the true nature of revelation in that it is through suffering that revelation comes. Put in simple terms, the Prophets in the Old Testament and the Prophet of Islam suffered. It is an essential part of the revelatory process for

\(^{14}\text{Lamb, Call to Retrieval, 152, 169.}\)
the revelation from God to become personal and embodied in the receiver and bearer of revelation. Thus Jesus was the Prophet *par excellence* when he died on the cross. There was vicarious suffering in this act but not a substitutionary atonement.

Traditional theology about Jesus and the cross interprets Jesus the Christ to be not just Prophet, but Priest and King as well. Cragg's approach develops an innovative interpretation for the prophetic aspect of Jesus' role. Cragg also has a distinctive approach to the priestly function but it plays a considerably smaller part. The glory side of the kingship of Jesus the Christ and the aspects of his life and teaching which would emphasise this are all but missing in his writing.

The second non-orthodox emphasis Cragg gives to the cross is more literary or symbolic (see Ch. 7). It is the symbol of Jesus' outstretched arms of welcome to the whole world. This is the other major factor which underlies Cragg's overall interpretation of the New Testament. He interprets this welcome much more broadly than just the cross, but it is nevertheless a key element to his theology of the cross. Cragg takes words like 'openness', 'welcome', 'courtesy', 'meeting', 'greeting' but most importantly, 'hospitality', to explain this concept and its applicability to the church today. He links these terms back to the New Testament Greek text and develops a theology based on them.

Neither of these dual emphases of suffering prophethood and openness would be considered wrong by those who hold to a traditional interpretation of the
meaning of the cross of Christ. The unusual aspect for Cragg is that his theology is built on these premises, often times to the exclusion of other theological understanding. These in turn are the filters through which the New Testament is read.

It needs to be added, however, that despite the above mentioned unusual emphases, there are ways in which Cragg holds to quite a high Christology, particularly in terms of his belief in Jesus' self-awareness of who he was as God incarnate and the consistency between Gospels and Epistles as to the significance of his life and death leading to the formation of the church. It is his Christology, perhaps more than anything else, that has led those who hold to traditional, Protestant doctrines of Christianity to claim him as one of their own. We argue, however, that his theology of the nature of revelation and its interactive qualities moves him away from any traditional pigeonhole. This is particularly visible in his treatment of Christian Scriptures. Indeed, Cragg defies easy classification, yet what is difficult to categorise is indication of a creative energy which provides new insights. We now consider 'hospitality' as a paradigm for New Testament interpretation.
Cragg might not claim that the analogy of 'hospitality' of the gospel is his major paradigm for New Testament interpretation. That is an analysis which we offer. Thus we begin this chapter by explaining why the particular interpretative concept of hospitality has been singled out from others. This is undertaken in a variety of ways throughout the chapter, but we begin by noting how Lamb deals with Cragg's understanding of hospitality within his theme of retrieval and how our analysis differs from Lamb's.

We then consider from where the idea of hospitality may have originated for Cragg, including how he uses Christian Scriptures to argue his theology. Finally we study the implications for how the concept of hospitality follows quite naturally with the changing nature of Christian/Muslim engagement. Cragg may have been a forerunner to major changes about to take place in the Christian world but he was not out of line with his times and followed in the tradition of something which had already begun.

### 7.1 Why Hospitality?

Both concepts of revelation and hospitality are key to New Testament interpretation for Cragg but there is a qualitative difference in the function of each. Revelation is a theological model which is a theoretical and intellectual
Our argument is that Cragg sees Christian Scriptures only through this model. Yet 'many models are necessary since all are partial.' His own private definition of revelation and his use of it as a single model has influenced his approach to Christian Scriptures.

Hospitality, on the other hand, is an analogy or metaphor which Cragg uses to describe the content of the gospel and so the New Testament. Its purpose is affective rather than intellectual and calls for a heart rather than a mind response. Models, on the other hand, are 'comprehensive metaphors with organizing, structural potential.' The model of revelation and the metaphor of hospitality do overlap. Yet revelation and hospitality serve different purposes and do not present an essential conflict for Cragg.

Hospitality is a frequent theme in Cragg's writings. Additionally, Cragg himself has placed great emphasis on it. For Cragg hospitality is 'surely the closest of all analogies to the meaning of the Gospel' (*Christianity in World Perspective* 1968, 71). If there were to be a single word for Cragg that could describe the nature of the gospel and thus much of the content of the New Testament, it would be the word 'hospitality'.

---

2 See Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 7 for an explanation of the difference between metaphors and models.
While Cragg sees other interpretative analogies or filters for the New Testament, hospitality is the most encompassing for him. Many of the others also tie back into hospitality. For instance even as important an event as the cross of Christ, Cragg ties back into his analogy of hospitality. ‘In the poetic theology of the Early Church one of the tenderest images was that of the ekpetasis, the embrace of the extended arms of Jesus on the cross and the open hands of welcome’ (Christianity in World Perspective 1968, 40). We take up the analysis of hospitality and the cross more fully later in this chapter.

Although Cragg does not overtly develop a systematic theology for interpreting the New Testament, this does not lessen the importance of his principles and filters (even if unconscious) of interpretation. In this chapter we demonstrate that Cragg comes with a pre-understanding of the Bible which largely revolves around the concept of hospitality. While he interprets the Bible through the single model of revelation, what that revelation must be is often decided by his metaphor of hospitality. Hospitality then effectively functions as a touchstone for the (often) unconscious development of a canon within the canon. We earlier noted how ‘accommodation’ might be an alternative approach which Cragg could bring to the Old Testament and which would still be consistent with his theology (see 5.4). The same point has some relevance for his understanding of hospitality. In actual fact Cragg utilises the theological concept of accommodation without naming it through his emphasis on hospitality and his definition of revelation. God accommodates

---

to communicate. Christians can learn more of God through exercising hospitality to those of other faiths because the nature of God's accommodation to them is different from that in the new religious setting.

7.1.1 Hospitality versus retrieval

Lamb has not missed the important concept of hospitality, stating that for Cragg, "Hospitality" is the key metaphor and the Spirit the theological door."\(^6\) Indeed, the theme of hospitality cannot be missed if one is to do justice to Cragg's writings. Lamb did not attempt to define how Cragg uses hospitality, noting instead that it was a useful metaphor which Cragg used to develop his theology of religion\(^7\) as well as being a concept which underpinned his sense of missionary purpose.\(^8\) Lamb's approach treats hospitality as but one metaphor that is used to gain a better understanding of Cragg's approach to theology and other faiths. The key word for Lamb is 'retrieval'. He concludes that in Cragg's understanding Christian essentials 'have to be retrieved, in the exercise of hospitality to unfamiliar and alien ways of thought and life. For we are ourselves at all times recipients of the divine hospitality.'\(^9\)

This thesis takes a different approach from Lamb's for two reasons. First, we are concerned with Christian Scriptures, not Cragg's life or his calling. Retrieval is a word that describes a goal or a strategy which relates to Cragg's

---

\(^6\) Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 72.
\(^7\) Ibid., 66-74. Lamb uses 'theology of religion' to cover what Cragg later called 'theology in cross-reference' in *The Christ and the Faiths*.
\(^8\) See section entitled 'Cragg's Missionary Inheritance,' *ibid.*, 100-7.
lifelong ambition and missionary call. Hospitality, on the other hand, is a more useful term for describing an interpretative approach.

But secondly, and more importantly, is that given the change in Cragg's more recent writings, we argue that retrieval is not the best choice of words to describe Cragg's overall approach. Lamb states that Cragg's theology has not changed over the years. Operating from this premise, Lamb basically interprets all Cragg's writing in the light of the theological framework given in *The Call of the Minaret* (1956) where the concept of retrieval is first and fully developed. We argue that there is a significant change in Cragg's theology, particularly dating from the time of *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986) on, and that this is something Lamb has overlooked. It has admittedly become clearer since he completed his thesis, as *The Christ and the Faiths* had just been published as he was completing his work. We now take up this point in greater detail because it is illustrative of a common misunderstanding amongst people who have studied Cragg, that is, that they interpret his later writings in the light of earlier work.

Cragg has used hospitality and retrieval, both unusual terms which are not common in theological discourse, to make his own theological points. If we compare this usage to the methodology he employs to develop his model of revelation we see that they are different. With revelation Cragg took a familiar word and redefined it. With hospitality and retrieval Cragg employs

---

10 See the Synopsis in Lamb, 'Call to Retrieval'.
two non-theological terms to develop a theological understanding which both challenges and stretches his readers.

Hospitality conveys the idea of accommodating, in our case, Islam. Making room for it, hearing it, understanding it are all part of this. Hospitality is both given and received. Retrieval can only be understood as going back to something which once was but is not now. Both words, however, have undergone a shift in emphasis in Cragg. Over the course of his writing Cragg develops and strengthens the concept of hospitality with many streams feeding into it. The concept of retrieval, on the other hand, has diminished in usage and where it has been used, the meaning has taken a clear shift.

Retrieval was first used by Cragg in *The Call of the Minaret* in the title and the content for one major chapter in the book (‘The Call to Retrieval,’ *Call of the Minaret* 1956, 244-70). As can be expected from this rather unusual choice of word, the original meaning refers to retrieval of the true gospel, Christ crucified for all humanity. This true gospel has been sullied and even lost sight of over the years through poor interpretation and practice on the part of both Christians and Muslims. Thus this chapter in his first book deals with various points of misunderstandings, particularly in the outworking of historical events. Misunderstanding and history have created needless barriers for Muslims. Christians themselves have misunderstood Christian essentials. What needs to be retrieved can first be seen, then comprehended and finally articulated through the exercise of hospitality. Putting it very simply, the word is used in the context of bringing Muslims into the household of one
(Christian) faith, something evangelicals have applauded and Muslims have railed against (see introduction to Ch. 2). For Cragg, Christians needed to exercise patience for this to happen (the last chapter of the first edition of *The Call of the Minaret*).

In *Faith and Life Negotiate*, however, in a rare use of the word in his later writing, Cragg describes his personal goal of retrieval, not just in the above sense from *The Call of the Minaret* but also in helping Christians out of 'their too facile neglect, ignorance or disavowal of the Qur'an' (*Faith and Life Negotiate* 1994, 208). Lamb noted a similar theme from *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986), but rather than recognising the change in Cragg he ties it together as one consistent theological understanding. Although Lamb identifies how Cragg uses retrieval in different ways, he fails to note the timeline and the changes from *The Call of the Minaret* (1956) to *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986) and beyond, a change which Cragg himself has acknowledged in his introduction to the second edition of (*Call of the Minaret*, 1985, p. vi). As a result Lamb misses a significant theological shift in Cragg. We argue that retrieval is not only a poor paradigm to apply to Cragg's interpretation of the Bible but that it may be in general a misleading paradigm to apply to his writings. The simple meaning of the word retrieval predisposes one towards seeing consistency back to a body of belief, rather than focusing on developing or changing concepts.

---

11 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 113.
Lamb interprets retrieval more broadly than Cragg's usage in *The Call of the Minaret* (1956), including quotations from *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986). But he assumes a consistency from early to later writing that is not there. There is progression but not consistency. This progression is important to our thesis because it is one indication of how Cragg's engagement with Islam may have affected his view of Christian Scriptures.

The change in Cragg's writings, particularly those which post-date Lamb's thesis, demonstrate that the strategy or goal of retrieval has changed for Cragg as he has developed his understanding of hospitality. On the other hand, hospitality, as a concept for understanding the nature of the Christian gospel, has been used more commonly and consistently in both early and later writings. Thus for us the key word is hospitality and not retrieval, first because it describes interpretation of the New Testament rather than Cragg's mission statement and secondly because it is the most broadly used of Cragg's analogies and is a foundation for many other interpretations, including retrieval.

We now give the sources from which Cragg may have drawn the concept of hospitality, following which we consider how this theme underlies his approach to the New Testament.

---

7.2 Conceptual Origin of Hospitality for Cragg

The word 'hospitality' does not spring obviously from the English New Testament. English translations of the Bible do not use hospitality to convey any special theological meaning as Cragg has done. Having said that, there is a related concept in the theme of home and exile in the New Testament. Goldingay links 1 Peter’s metaphorical use of exile or dispersion to subsequent Christian expressions of a ‘home’ in Christ when the world is inhospitable. Examples of its applicability can be seen in Europe or the spirituality of the slaves in North America. ‘Oh Lord, you know I have no friend like you. If heaven’s not my home, then Lord what will I do? The angels beckon me . . . ’ Other Negro spirituals convey similar messages.

John H. Elliott, to whom Goldingay credits the concept, has developed the theological motif more fully. The idea of home, homelessness, exile, etc. has been a part of human story since it was first recorded in writing. 1 Peter uses these concepts as symbols in his articulation of the gospel message. Elliott refers to it as a ‘sociological exegesis of 1 Peter.’ Goldingay notes further that this concept may be of use in interpretation of Daniel which presents itself as a literal exile but may have metaphorical meaning beneath the surface.

Though not the same as Cragg’s idea of hospitality, these concepts are related. Sallie McTague notes that metaphors or analogies are related to theological

---

Thus the analogy of hospitality can be expected to have some benefit. The question needs to be asked, however, if Cragg's definition and application is valid. In other words, what is his theological method in using this metaphor? Cragg definitely claims to derive hospitality from the New Testament but before we critique samples of his exegesis for this we look at the background which may have motivated him to find what is not immediately obvious to the casual Bible reader.

7.2.1 Hospitality in the Middle East

It is not surprising that the analogy of hospitality should have so caught Cragg's fancy given the culture of hospitality which exists in the Arab world. Hospitality is no more an Islamic concept than it is a Christian one. It exists in a variety of forms in many relational societies. We demonstrated that Kenneth Bailey has shown that ancient peasant culture in the Middle East is a common ground for communication and should be more utilised in this capacity. Doing historical exegesis and relating to peasant life today in the Middle East, Bailey shows how a proper understanding of at least one parable is contingent upon a proper understanding of hospitality in Middle Eastern peasant culture. This culture existed well before either Muhammad or Jesus. We reference it here to illustrate the point.

Bailey's interpretation of the parable of the 'importunate friend' or, as he prefers to call it, 'friend at midnight' (because of his understanding of the

\[\text{McFague, } \text{Metaphorical Theology}, \ 193.\]
interpretation) in Luke 11:5-8 is built entirely around the nature of hospitality in the Middle East. The demands of hospitality on the person asking for bread and the hospitality of the man woken in the night (God), Bailey sees as key to the meaning of the parable. Of course the neighbour will ask, given his need to provide hospitality — even in the middle of the night, and of course the householder will give, given the reputation in the community he must maintain. That reputation depends on his fulfilling the obligations of hospitality. According to Bailey, however, the key is to translate the meaning of the introductory words to the parable correctly. They should read something like 'Can you imagine!' Thus, just as it is preposterous to think a householder would delay with excuses in the parable, so it is preposterous to think God would not answer immediately. The point of the parable then, according to Bailey, is not persistence in prayer, but rather God's absolutely certain and prompt response to prayer. The parable makes this point by saying that as certain as the fulfilment of hospitality obligations is, God's response is even more sure. The parable only comes alive in its meaning when one understands just how important obligations of hospitality are in that peasant culture.

It is this same quality of hospitality, an essential ingredient to Middle East peasant culture, which Christians should exercise towards Muslims, according

---

17 This point about the nature of hospitality was first and most simply made in Audio Cassettes in 'New Perspectives on the Parables,' Vol. I-V: Pittsburgh: Logos Program, 1975. Number 3.1. Bailey later developed this into a more scholarly exegetical argument which takes into account standard, accepted scholarship on the parables but concludes with the same interpretation. See Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 119-133.
to Cragg. Though he does not reference Bailey, this understanding of hospitality is clearly evident and key for Cragg in terms of meaning.

7.2.2 Hospitality and the changing nature of Christian/Muslim engagement

The second practical reason for this emphasis on hospitality as an analogy for understanding the Christian gospel for Cragg, is the changing nature of relationships between Christians and Muslims. The confrontational approach was giving way to dialogue in the Middle East. Cragg's courteous approach was both unusual and more of an exception than the rule when he first began to write. However, it was not unique. It was in keeping with the changing climate of political and social engagement between Christians and Muslims. Cragg's primary contribution was in the religious area. Yet, even here he was not alone. There were those who came before him and influenced him such as Samuel Zwemer (in personal contacts with Muslims and respect conveyed through those rather than in his writings) and particularly Temple Gairdner and Constance Padwick, whose writings had influenced Cragg. Thus, though there were those who preceded Cragg, this relational approach to Islam was an idea whose time had come in the age of dialogue. Cragg's development of a theological concept which he describes as 'hospitality' of the gospel has come to be a significant contribution to this effort that others have later picked up.

---

18 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 100.
7.3 Meaning of Hospitality for Cragg

Despite a rather wide range of nuances, for Cragg there are three central but closely related elements to his concept of hospitality. There is an external meaning, an internal meaning, and, thirdly, an emphasis on the nature of the host-guest relationship. All three, of course, are also comfortably related to any normal understanding of the meaning of the word and thus cannot always be treated separately from one another.

The first (external) meaning ties in with the common meaning of hospitality in that it refers to courteous, polite, external relationships. Developing his theology, as always in the light of Islam, Cragg asserts the basic principle that there needs to be a courtesy towards those whose beliefs are different. How does a Christian interact with and entertain a Muslim in the truest sense of the word? Hospitality is the key because it describes the best type of relationship of person to person. ‘It is well for any study of Christian relationships with other men in their faiths to begin in the same praise of courtesy’ (Christian and Other Religion 1977, 17).

This type of approach was more the exception than the rule for those who engaged with Muslims in Cragg’s early days of writing. Engagement with Islam just one generation prior to Cragg could best be described as confrontational when it came to theological issues; particularly given the emphasis on debate which took place at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Christianity and Islam had a history of being in conflict.
Yet for Cragg the simple courtesy of hospitality, which already existed in the culture, should be a call to Christians to look outside the external hostilities between Christian and Muslims and practise courteous and polite relationships.

Besides Middle Eastern culture, God's hospitality to humanity as evidenced in the incarnation is a call on Christians to be hospitable to those of other faiths. 'As a faith whose heart conviction has to do with the hospitality of God in the human world, Christianity is surely bound to practise it towards the other guests' (*Christian and Other Religion* 1977, 17). Thus Christians should fulfil all there is to fulfil in terms of external relations, with Muslims who now, in so many ways, are truly neighbours to Christians.

Yet courtesy is only a beginning. Cragg's concept of hospitality goes beyond the simple external relationships. Hospitality, by definition, is the relationship of host to guest. Lamb explains that for Cragg Christian hospitality to the worshipping Muslim world was 'not merely in terms of meeting with people, and so accepting Muslim hospitality, but in the demanding hospitality of the Christian mind to the true intentions, the inner heart of Islam itself.'

The Christian faith must become the truly hospitable host to Islam. There are two related but separate streams which can be analysed. Cragg explains this relatively early in his writing career.

What ought the diversity of men's beliefs to mean for the interior shape and temper of the Christian mind and for the exterior relations of the

---

Christian faith among them? . . . Hospitality, potential and actual, is perhaps the closest common factor to unite them (Christianity in World Perspective 1968, 71).

Thus for Cragg hospitality grows out of engagement with another faith. It is a host and guest relationship. Christians must learn to be proper hosts to those of other faiths, as we have seen above and as Lamb has pointed out.

Also, hospitality requires two, the giver and the receiver. It is a relational experience which, though beginning with an attitude of courtesy, moves towards a consensus. We use an event recorded in the Gospel of Luke which Cragg has referenced in both early and later writings to explain how he develops this point.

Cragg makes frequent reference to the Emmaus Road incident recorded at the end of the Gospel of Luke. In his Bible Study series Emmaus Furlongs (1962), he developed the concept in such a way as to give a clearer picture of what he means by hospitality. In poetic style Cragg notes that Cleopas’ companion is unnamed and so unidentified. The two argue as they walk to Emmaus and ‘Cleopas’ friend stands for anybody with a will to discipleship and a weight of perplexity’ (‘Emmaus Furlongs’, No. 1, p. 5). So Cragg imagines the argument about the nature of events which had taken place in Jerusalem can be understood to be between Muslim and Christian.

Islam, some six centuries on, re-opened in retrospect those themes with which Cleopas and ’x’ went out from Jerusalem. The days of our time run through different noons to other evenings (‘Emmaus Furlongs’, No. 1, p. 12).
But more than between Muslim and Christian, it is between Christianity and Islam where 'the whole of Islam walks the Emmaus road in the company of Cleopas... In overhearing how Jesus reasons with Cleopas, we learn how He would explain Himself at the portal of a mosque' ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 2, p. 10).

To express this modern equivalent in other words, 'x' stands for the Muslim who questions and argues with the Christian, Cleopas, about the fact and meaning of the events in Jerusalem. The Muslim undoubtedly questions the Christian faith but the Christian also does not understand it. The exercise of hospitality, taking place on a journey through life together, offers opportunity for that which lies beneath dogma to assert itself. In that sense it is related to the true nature of revelation for Cragg. The interactive nature of revelation is experienced through this dialogue. In 'Emmaus Furlongs', Cragg portrays Christians and Muslims as sincerely equal in their struggle to understand. A hospitable community is created in this mutual struggle.

'As they communed together and reasoned...' Community is the crux of all study. 'The world' wrote John Wesley, 'has no room for a solitary Christian.' Neither has Christian doctrine: it is a faith that requires the fellowship it creates. Jesus our Lord, Cleopas and his fellow this is the partnership of authority and unity in which the Christian learns his faith ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 1, p. 11).

The idea of community in Scriptural interpretation is not new. Sanneh implies this when he applauds the mother-tongue projects of missionaries which made it possible for there to be empowering revelation in the language of people or group.20 The Christian hermeneutic becomes a world

---

20 Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, 142.
hermeneutic. Others, too, have noted the importance of Christian community for the right interpretation of Scripture. Christian Scriptures were largely written for a confessing community and must be understood by a community.

Goldingay introduces several possible contexts of ‘corporateness’ in interpreting Scripture which go beyond the confessing Christian community and include society and the ‘universal human context’. In a sense this is what Cragg is doing as he stretches the bounds of community in the above quote. Liberation theology began with community concerns in South and Central America but added an understanding of the Bible that had not been seen before and now has carried over into other areas. A similar phenomenon is developing with dalet theology in India which is a theology for the poor and dispossessed. Community is important for Cragg in his writing.

The outcome of this community in this early writing, however, is different from the later outcome. In the ‘Emmaus Road’ pamphlet series it is only when Jesus is clearly seen and understood that the true purpose and meaning of his work on the cross can be understood. In that sense the word retrieval is applicable to describe Cragg’s theological approach. The true meaning of the gospel is retrieved when Jesus comes to them and explains the answers to their questions. Out of this they both see things differently. Special revelation of

Jesus makes that possible. The community is one of mutual questioning. The emphasis by Cragg is on how each questions. The Muslim questions are different from what the Christian might first think and the Christian actually has questions he may not have realised.

When Cragg takes up the same illustration almost three decades later, the purpose of community is different. We use one example from *What Decided Christianity* (1989) where he has the same basic premise of hospitality but with a different (perhaps even inadvertent) conclusion. The Emmaus Road imagery is again picked up but is applied in a different form.

In an explanation of the different theologies of the Gospel writers, Cragg explains how Luke is keen to demonstrate continuity through fulfilment of prophecy from Hebraic past. Cragg references Luke's use of the Emmaus Road story to make this point. According to Cragg, 'Luke understands [Jesus] "expounding in all the Scriptures things concerning himself."' Of this he writes:

That phrasing has aroused in some quarters an over-inventiveness with typology. It surely means a consensus, a logic, of the whole, the ending . . . to the Christ as indispensable to history . . . The entire Gospel, the being of the Church, hinge on that consensus. Scripture, Luke avows, intends and undergirds them both (*What Decided Christianity* 1989, 75).

It is now not Jesus coming to both, Muslim and Christian, on the road and explaining himself, easing their puzzlement. Rather consensus instead of a mutually searching community is now the indispensable outcome to hospitality. Christ is no less indispensable but his role is different. The theme that revelation is interactive thus becomes stronger and the original concept of
retrieval from *The Call of the Minaret* weaker. Consensus on the part of an inter-faith community becomes increasingly important. Hospitality is the vehicle through which this can be achieved.

In summary, hospitality is used as an analogy for the gospel both early and late in Cragg’s writings. The meaning is both external and internal with a particular emphasis on the Christian faith’s being hospitable to the full mind of Islam. Early writings of Cragg could be interpreted to mean that the outcome of hospitality is retrieval of the true meaning of the gospel not just for Muslim but for Christian as well. There is, however, a shift in emphasis about hospitality in later writings from a searching community to consensus, indicating a development in Cragg’s understanding of the interactive nature of revelation.

### 7.4 New Testament Basis for Hospitality

Above we have already seen how Cragg sees hospitality in one part of the New Testament, i.e., the story from the end of Luke of disciples on the Emmaus Road. This was more of an example of reading hospitality back into the account rather than of hospitality being the major thrust of the event for the author himself. We now take two other examples from Cragg, which involve Greek words which are key for him as he develops his concept of a theology of hospitality. Both he has referenced in several places in his writing over the years, further indicating the importance he attaches to them.
7.4.1 ἐκπέτασις

'Early Christian imagery saw in the ἐκπέτασις, the arms stretched upon the cross, the gesture of embrace, an embrace of the world. It was the human whole which God, they said, "so loved" (What Decided Christianity 1989, 118). Cragg credits the New Testament church, referring to it as 'earliest Christian devotion' (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 205) with the embracing meaning of ἐκπέτασις.

The word ἐκπέτασις is not drawn from the New Testament. The closest derivation is found in Romans 10:21 which quotes Isaiah 65:2 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people' (NIV). There are some difficulties with Cragg's definition of this single-word exegesis of ἐκπέτασις and then his subsequent reliance on it. Standard Greek-English Lexicons which normally include usage from early Christian documents as well as the New Testament do not define the word as meaning 'embrace' as Cragg has done. They give the verb ἐκπέταννυμι and its related derivative, ἐκπέτασις, (which Cragg uses) as meaning 'spreading out' (of a sail/wings). This is a meaning Cragg says it does not have. 'From earliest Christian devotion the arms of the cross were not seen as "branching off indefinitely:"

---

rather they were seen as “reaching round definitely” in a costly embrace, which the Church called, in the Greek, *ekpetasis* (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 205).

To compound the problem of this interpretation Cragg often uses quotations marks (for example, as just given above) which he does not reference. Early Christian devotion is not referenced in this above quote nor in other places where he refers to it in conjunction with the meaning he gives *ekpetasis*. There are several places where the Church Fathers interpret the arms outstretched in a symbolic way with various nuances of meaning. Athanasius interprets the two arms of the cross as reaching out to the two groups of people, Jews and Gentiles. St. Chrysostom writes that ‘the stretching out of the hands, means calling and drawing them to Him, and inviting them.’ But Cragg also has taken liberties with even their interpretation. Neither carry the meaning of embrace. Chrysostom also emphasises the second part of Romans 10:21 which indicates their ‘fault’ in rejecting him, something Cragg does not highlight. Cragg does, however, reference later modern poetry which illustrates this imagery of embrace.

However valid the concept of hospitality, Cragg has not adequately justified the usage of *ekpetasis* as a basis for this interpretation. If this meaning of ‘embrace’ is there in early Christian writing Cragg has not, as yet, demonstrated

---

adequate proof. Reaching out is there but not embrace. Instead it seems Cragg may have read back into Christian Scriptures and early Christian sources an interpretation he has developed for reasons other than being informed from the actual texts. We can better understand the theological reasons which may have given birth to this interpretation when we see the application Cragg draws from his meaning of ἐκπέτασις.

Cragg has developed at least two significant applications based on his meaning of ἐκπέτασις. In his autobiography, in the chapter 'Tribunal of Islam', Cragg notes that continuing traditional perceptions of the cross of Christ both for Muslims and for Christians have been a cause of division. The extent of this division, however, may be unnecessary for both Christianity and Islam if the true meaning of that cross is properly understood. So he searches for common ground in Muslim and Christian sources. In one instance Cragg does this by making a juxtaposition between iltazam and ἐκπέτασις. Iltazam is the practice in the hajj (Muslim pilgrimage) of 'embrace' where the pilgrims press themselves against the stone at the multazam (place of embrace) which is between the door and the eastern corner of the Ka'bah. Though not a practice which comes from the Qur'ān, Cragg ties it into meaning taken from Surah 17.13 of embrace being 'crucial to the believer's conviction and a concept of need and its satisfaction where . . . the divine and the human are at rendezvous.' He summarises that "'Embrace,' then, whether ἐκπέτασις or iltizam, belongs, of necessity to both faiths, however far the contrasts' (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 206). This mutual (Christian and Muslim) religious quest according to Cragg, became the basis for his own approach of beginning
with what was in common in Islam, rather than what was different.

Hospitality of the gospel looks for a reciprocating openness in Islam (Ibid., 229).

In a different explanation of ἐκκέντασις, Cragg gives it another meaning. This 'embrace' of Christ on the cross was for the whole world. 'When the disciples listened, out of all their experience, to the Jesus in whom they read the Christ, they heard him to have said: "I came to save the world." (John 12.47), and that sufficed them' (What Decided Christianity 1989, 120).

Cragg then asks, if it was for the whole world why did it come only in a particular Jewish context? He finds the answer in a few places in the New Testament, which, though not having a vast literature about a Christian engagement with other faiths, does have some hints.

Whether it be Paul on Mars Hill, or John of Ephesus in that Aegean capital, or Luke in presentation for Theophilus, the hints are discernible about how it might be done elsewhere. To have the ambition of a Christ-sharing world means to hold a Christ whom none can monopolise, alive to a world which no faith monopolises (What Decided Christianity 1989, 121).

Although the above arguments are not unusual, Cragg has woven them into his definition of ἐκκέντασις. The reason why 'embrace' is the key meaning rather than 'spreading out indefinitely' is related, according to Cragg, to the way the Christian faith includes other faiths in an attitude of hospitality yet preserves its distinctiveness. For a Christian host mind to be truly hospitable to the Muslim guest mind, the perceptions of the guest must be understood and embraced.
The shore on which Cragg eventually lands takes him away from a traditional understanding of the cross. It is the voluntary, vicarious and perfect suffering of true prophethood — no more. Each of these three elements are in a traditional Protestant understanding of a substitutionary atonement but there is usually more. In Cragg’s understanding, Jesus does not bear the sin of the world on the cross. Rather he suffers vicariously, even unto death, because of that sin. Substitutionary atonement with its reference back to Old Testament sacrifice and paying the price is an exclusive concept, according to Cragg. It was the language people knew and so used, but the cross must not be understood in this way today. It should be inclusive in its embrace. The missionary call for the message of Christ and the cross to go into all the world remains important for Cragg, as is demonstrated above when he spells out the implications of this ἐκπέτασις for Christian mission. It is important that people know and then take up their cross (voluntary suffering). This is part of the interactive nature of received revelation. It is the knowledge of the true nature of the cross along with the action of people taking up their crosses that will stem the tide of evil in the world. It is not the accepting of a substitute for sin.

This interpretation of the cross is in contrast to traditional Christian understanding of, for instance, the imagery of John 3:14 which compares the cross of Christ to the bronze snake lifted up in the wilderness. In the Old Testament people who had been bitten but looked and believed were spared. The imagery in John is not one of Christ on the cross embracing but rather of

---

28 See the classic work by L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement.*
his 'spreading out' for all as a means of life to those who believed enough to look. Those who did not look, died. Cragg interprets it not as a loss to the unresponsive as John 3:14 does, but rather as a loss to the ‘embrace’. The embrace of the cross is deprived by those who set themselves beyond the need or reach of it’ ('Doctrine' 1969, 412).

There are no surprises in Cragg's methodology or theology here. Cragg's definition of \(\varepsilon\kappa\nu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma\) is one example of how he uses a private definition, developed outside of usual scholarly methods, to bolster a particular theological understanding. His method is to read meaning, which he has developed elsewhere, back into the text of the Bible or other unnamed early Christian literature.

7.4.2 \(\alpha\pi\omega\delta\omicron\chi'\)

The second Greek reference, \(\alpha\pi\omega\delta\omicron\chi'\), is used with the Greek word in only one place (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 325). There are also other places in his writing where he makes the same points but references only the English translation.\(^{29}\) \(\alpha\pi\omega\delta\omicron\chi'\), unlike \(\varepsilon\kappa\nu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma\), is a word which comes directly from the New Testament. Cragg introduces it with a standard translation 'The familiar words of 1 Timothy 1:15 as to the “faithful saying” which deserves complete \(\alpha\pi\omega\delta\omicron\chi'\) i.e. acceptance or reception' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 325).

Yet Cragg is again careless in his referencing and accuracy of meaning. Immediately following he misquotes a reference and gives another meaning of ἀποδοξῆ as 'welcome' without an explanation of how he comes to that conclusion. The writer repeats the phrase in 1 Tim. 4:11 and it reads like an emerging formula for things credal. Αριστοχάλκις means 'worth of welcome', and with ἑσσες "universal welcome" (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 325).

Though a small point, the reference should be to 1 Timothy 4:9, not verse 11. Secondly, the standard translation ἀποδοξῆ has assumed, without explanation, a different nuance of meaning, one which is more consonant with Cragg's emphasis on hospitality. 'Acceptance' or 'reception' has suddenly become 'welcome'. It is only several paragraphs later that Cragg gives a basis for this but he does so with an English translation quote from the Vulgate, not the Greek. 'Omni acceptione dignus says the Vulgate, in the 1947 English translation: "What a welcome it deserves!"' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 326).

It seems Cragg has again given a personal definition without adequate justification. The 'acceptance'/'reception' and 'welcome' may be related, but there are differences in meaning. Yet despite this questionable exegesis Cragg makes a significant theological point based on this interpretation. He immediately follows on from the above to say,

The universal range [ἀποδοξῆ] must be argued from the all-commendable content. This means that our theology must always be alert for the

30 It is possible Cragg drew this meaning came from the Van Dyke Arabic translation of the Bible where ἀποδοξῆ is translated 'kul qabul' ('full friendly' or 'hosptialable reception' [Wehr, Arabic English Dictionary, 739]).
impulses of welcome which must therefore be latent everywhere and with all faiths (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 326).

There is a problem with this interpretation. It seems that Cragg may have changed the antecedent of whom or what is welcomed, along with changing the meaning of ἀποδόχη from ‘acceptance’/‘reception’ to ‘welcome’. The usual understanding of 1 Timothy 1:15 is that it is the salvation of Christ which is to be received or accepted by others. Cragg’s interpretation makes it a person — a host-guest relationship which ties into his theme of hospitality. The host (the Christian) is to make the guest feel comfortable. The guest must be accommodated in a manner which is significant to him in order for this to happen.

It could be argued that Cragg’s interpretation is not the text’s real intent. The offer of hospitality does not change the freedom of the guest. Salvation is worthy to be accepted but some may not accept it. To strengthen this argument further, it is worth mentioning that there is another understanding of hospitality in the New Testament. It is seen in the parable of the wedding banquet in Mt. 22:8-14. Here the hospitality contains the potential for rejection on the part of the guest. Present day Protestant commentators take wedding garment as meaning the righteousness that God provides for all who accept his invitation. God issues an undeserved invitation to undeserving people, and in addition provides the righteousness the invitation demands. The rejection of that (wedding garment) leads to condemnation. This is another aspect to a

---

host-guest relationship. It too is understandable and is set in Middle Eastern culture but offers the possibility of rejection. This seems to be more in keeping with the usual understanding of the 1 Timothy passage. Thus we argue that hospitality can be inferred from 1 Timothy 1:15 through the translation ‘acceptance’. This interpretation offers the possibility of rejection on the part of the guest. This element of hospitality, one which accepts that there can be rejection, is also present in the New Testament. Cragg’s interpretation which led to translating \( \delta \nu \delta \omega \gamma \) as meaning ‘welcome’ clearly draws back from the consequences or even the idea of rejection.

In conclusion it appears that the scholarly grounds on which Cragg does his New Testament interpretation do not seem as important to him as does the development of a general philosophy or theology which is compassionately inclusive, though still distinctly Christian. Cragg’s approach to Christian Scriptures seems to be deductive rather than inductive, where the theology is formed and then read back into the text. Cragg holds that hospitality is a theme of the New Testament and the closest analogy of all to the Christian gospel. We believe Cragg has not adequately demonstrated that hospitality, as he defines it, necessarily does appear in the New Testament. What strands of hospitality there are in the New Testament, can be argued to have an interpretation which Cragg does not develop. We conclude that Cragg’s particular exegesis is largely due to the particular interpretative perspective with which he comes to the New Testament, i.e., that of hospitality and what it entails from Christian to Muslim.
7.5 Implications of Hospitality in New Testament Interpretation

Now that we have seen that the analogy of hospitality through which Cragg views Christian Scriptures is based, at least partially, on quite private interpretations of words and passages in the New Testament, we consider three implications arising from this.

7.5.1 High view of the New Testament

Cragg maintains a high view of the New Testament, using it as his authority to write. We have already noted that after acknowledging problems in the New Testament, Cragg largely ignores critical issues, accepting the text as given. We have also noted several reasons for this which arise from his engagement with Islam (Ch. 2, 4).

Another reason for his high view of the New Testament is his understanding of the 'hospitality' of the gospel. How Cragg sees the content of the New Testament again is influenced by his engagement with Islam. Cragg interprets an inclusiveness to the New Testament message which can include Islam, at least to the extent of interpreting a continuity of Islam into the gospel message.

One reason Cragg may be comfortable largely ignoring critical problems in the New Testament is because he interprets the content in the New Testament to be such that it embraces all of humanity in a true hospitality. He supports a conservative, high view of the New Testament documents on the basis of
content, not a developed theology of interpretation. Because he understands the content in a certain way, he can accept a canon of the New Testament, and despite limitations, live with the decision of the community of believers which accepted this canon.

Cragg's difficulty with the Old Testament was based on content. The ethnicity of the Old Testament was not hospitable to others in the way the New Testament is. The content, which for Cragg can best be described as the hospitality of the gospel, is the major reason he holds to a high view of the New Testament. Because he does not see that same content in the Old Testament, he is not motivated to find an alternative, and, we have argued, more theologically consistent ways of interpreting it. It should be noted that even in the New Testament he has developed a canon within the canon where he ignores bits which can only be interpreted as inhospitable, such as the parable of the wedding feast (Mt. 22:8-14) while accepting other passages that are hospitable (see Ch. 8).

7.5.2 Hospitality corrects exclusivity

For Cragg there are three major areas in Christianity and Islam that go against the true nature of the hospitality of the gospel. All three are corrected in the New Testament. We have already seen how Cragg interprets the problem of blatant ethnicity of the Old Testament. It was not God's intention, as evidenced by the prophets' (albeit only occasional) speaking against it. The New Testament corrected this.
It was precisely this dilemma which the New Testament overcame by transferring the instrumental peoplehood from the realm of nation-people-covenant consciousness into a peoplehood constituted on the sole principle of faith and gathered out of any and every culture, any and every tribe (What Decided Christianity 1989, 112).

We have seen how the strength of Cragg's conviction about the wrongness of the ethnicity in the Old Testament has only grown in his writings over the years to a point that his recent book, The Lively Credentials of God (1995), challenges the morality of the nature of God's covenant with Israel (see 5.1.4). This is a move away from traditional interpretation and Cragg's earlier affirmations in works such as The Call of the Minaret which interprets God's dealing with Israel as a prototype for his dealings with all of humanity.

Secondly, Cragg very fairly accepts the Qur'ân at face value. He does not subject it to questions he does not ask of the New Testament. In fact one could say his treatment of the Qur'ân is much the same as that of the New Testament. He praises the Qur'ân for the universality of its message, unlike that of the Old Testament in the Bible.

Precisely because it transcends the 'ethnic' and sees prophets sent to a variety of peoples and prophecy itself culminating in a final and universal messenger, but in the same inclusively educative and directive, rather than redemptive or regenerating, relation to mankind, Islam has no cause to perpetuate the Hebrew 'discrimination' of one land and one people, over against other lands and other peoples. It does not, in that way, particularise its theology of the economic order or require its sense of history and of ecology to be dominated by an 'elected' perpetuity of uniqueness (Privilege of Man 1968, 104).

From early on, however, Cragg has struggled with the Muslim concept of 'state' and how dār-ul-islâm (lit. house of Islam, signifying the rightly guided Muslim state ruled by the Caliph) so dominates Muslim life. At first he
interprets it as legitimately coming from the Qur’an as ‘the revealed authority of government’. ‘[The horizons of Islam are] sanctioned . . . and firmly undergirded by the revealed authority of government on behalf of God’ (ibid.).

Later, however, Cragg suggests that it was primarily the response of Muslim peoples to historical events that led to this. They based their direction on the Qur’an but it was only one of several possible interpretations of the Qur’an which has produced this type of exclusivity in the form of state (see 2.6.2 and Readings in the Qur’an 1988, 71). The very nature of state is to include some and exclude others. This has led to exclusivity and traditionally negative reaction from the Muslim community toward Christianity, which, for Cragg, is as much of a negative as the ethnicity of the Old Testament.

Thus a present day proud claim some Muslims make that in Islam there is no separation between religion and state might be countered by Cragg by suggesting that perhaps there should be! The thinking and argument which developed the Muslim faith into a state is not as it was originally intended in the Qur’an, according to Cragg, and logically not one to which thoughtful Muslims can adhere. These arguments are more fully developed in Returning to Mount Hira’ (1994) and, briefly, earlier in ‘How Not Islam’ (1977). For Cragg the concept of state in Islam has the same exclusive overtones as that of the ethnic tribalism in the Old Testament.

The third area Cragg rejects is where Christianity has developed exclusivity similar to that which is present in Islam’s current understanding of dār-ul-islām.
As the church developed in Christianity expressions of the faith have become exclusive in nature through rejecting 'heretics', sometimes (but by no means always) because they draw on an Old Testament ideology of God's people. The inclusion of the Old Testament in the canon of Christian Scriptures poses an ongoing risk that this might happen in the future. This is not the nature of the hospitality of the gospel. Such exclusivity rejects, out of hand, any possible continuity with other faiths. Cragg is keen to demonstrate that the Christian gospel, as contained in the New Testament, cannot do this and be true to itself.

It is often assumed that the gospel makes its way only by a total otherness, by contradiction of what it finds. Its authority is then one of judgement. It must disavow what it meets before it can enter. The sequence to its impact, paradoxically, is discontinuity. This can hardly be so, if it is truly to 'merit welcome' (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 326).

The same type of rejection has happened in Islam. Cragg has struggled to bring understanding between the Christian and Muslim faiths through greater understanding of Scriptures. The intent of the Qur'an and the intent of the New Testament needed to be clarified and reaffirmed again.

Interpreting the New Testament through the analogy of hospitality supports what we have argued is Cragg's approach of treating the Qur'an as an old testament to the New.

It is no less important, in the after-and-before direction, to discern relationships and see them determining precedents fit to be abiding. In this kind of situation, mere chronology has no place. The core of the New Testament, it may be said, is already 'Islamic' in the issues it faces and 'un-Islamic' in the decisions it takes, especially Gethsemane as its definitive event. But, by the same token, it is also deeply Islamic in its concerns to which those decisions belong — the sovereignty of God, the universality of mercy, the correction of evil, the release of thanksgiving and the claims of eternity (Alive to God 1970, 34).
In later writings his theme of continuity between Christianity and Islam is even greater. We give one example of how Cragg explains how Christians can more sympathetically understand the Qur'an, without rejecting the Bible.

If we could clarify how close . . . were the doxologies of the Qur'an to Biblical psalmody, how akin to the New Testament dictum that 'every creation of God is good if it be received with thanksgiving' (I Timothy 4:4), would we not have enlarged our sympathies, not by compromise, still less by easy patronage, but by genuine acknowledgement of truth? (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 209).

This can only happen when the Christian approaches the other faith through the mindset of hospitality.

According to Cragg, all three of the above problems of ethnicity in the Old Testament, state in Islam, and continuing exclusivity in Christianity and Islam, are addressed by the New Testament in its expression of the hospitality of the gospel.

To have the ambition of a Christ-sharing world means to hold a Christ whom none can monopolise, alive to a world which no faith monopolises. We have vastly more reason to appreciate that double fact in our time than the apostles had in theirs. Articulate co-existence and the inter-penetration of societies and cultures are the pattern of our contemporary situation. It is precisely because there has to be, on the part of the religions, a conscious sharing of the world that the distinctive heart of Christianity must inform that consciousness (What Decided Christianity 1989, 121).

The hospitality of the gospel, as portrayed in the New Testament, is the key to a Christ-sharing world where Christ is monopolised by no one.

---

32 Alive to God 1970, contains many examples of what Cragg understands to be Quranic doxologies.
7.5.3 Distinct versus unique

The third implication of hospitality is that Cragg has come to shun the word 'unique' in favour of 'distinctive' to describe Christianity. 'Distinctive' indicates a difference and yet a solidarity with and continuity from other faiths. Cragg did use 'unique' to describe Christianity in early writing, although he sought to qualify how Christianity was unique. 'When we claim, in all theological honesty, a truth which is unique and which, by God's grace is also ours, it seems indistinguishably a claim to a truth which is unique because it is ours' (emphasis original; 'Hearing by the Word of God' 1957, 245). But following what we mark as a change in his theological approach in 1986 Cragg shunned the use of the word 'unique' to describe the Christian faith.

'Unique' is not a word to use here. For it has an exclusiveness, even a hostility, about it, as that which is totally 'other'. The gospel, however, has many 'overlaps' but with them, and indeed because of them, possesses a quality, holds a content, in terms affirmed and cherished nowhere else (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 323).

Interestingly, however, he continues to use 'unique' in key descriptions about Islam.33 One wonders why he has ended up moving so strongly away from the word in Christianity but maintains it in Islam.

In addressing Islam, one question Cragg has sought to answer is how the cross of Christ is not exclusive in its very nature. Is it unaffirming of different peoples if it is the only way to God? By adopting the approach of seeing the distinctives of Christianity rather than the more traditional view of

33 See for instance references to Muhammad's revelation as unique Readings in the Qur'ân 1988, 17, as well as reference to the Prophet's unique role (p. 26).
uniqueness, Cragg can affirm that Christianity answers the universal questions of humanity which other faiths legitimately seek to answer.

‘Uniqueness’ has never been a Christian term and does not exist in the New Testament. For it excludes all overlap of meaning and experience between faith-concerns. To do so is manifestly false. But ‘distinctive’ — welcoming such overlap — is right and important (What Decided Christianity 1989, 9).

For Cragg, however, Christianity is more deeply understanding of human nature and so more fully answers the problems humanity has. But it does so in continuity, rather than discontinuity with other systems of belief. ‘There is that about Christianity which is not found elsewhere in the same harmony, and hopefulness’ (emphasis original; ibid.) For Cragg, to see any form of exclusivity in the cross, as characterised by the use of such words as ‘unique’, goes against the truly hospitable nature of the Christian gospel as seen in the New Testament. It has the danger of moving into such actions as the Crusades in history.

As a thing of freedom and uncompulsive grace, the Gospel had no reason to apply duress or turn the non-acceders into criminals. That ‘whosoever will may come’ did not translate into ‘whosoever won’t must be compelled.’ The faith did indeed see enormous reproach in the crucifixion but its classic formula was ‘Behold, the sin of the world:’ there was nothing exclusively ‘the sin of Jews and Romans.’ The Cross only mirrored human wrong. When later, medieval generations [the Crusades] chose to see it differently, they betrayed their apostles and the Lord Himself (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 201).

Exclusivity is a natural human reaction to preserve and protect. It seeks to abolish risk in revelation. But there is always risk, according to Cragg, and no guarantees of outcome. Risk protection can lead to actions such as the now universally condemned Crusades. The risk of true prophethood suffering on the cross must be maintained through a full understanding of hospitality in
the New Testament. For Cragg this leads to a non-traditional view of the cross and of the nature of the atonement in Christianity.

7.6 Hospitality: Ethnicity or Culture?

There are several helpful perspectives which come out of Cragg's analogy of hospitality, not least of which is the motivation to see Islam in a positive light and so be open to new insights in Christian theology. But we have also seen that the concept of hospitality is motivated, at least partially, by the historical problems existing between Arab and Jew, and Christian and Muslim in the Middle East.

Hospitable, as Zechariah had foreseen (8:23), Jewry certainly was and proselytism was a wide and in measure a gracious phenomenon. Yet it had about it an irreducible 'imperialism' of the spirit... It required a Judaized adherence. The ethnic element persisted in the spiritual transaction ('Doctrine' 1969, 378).

It is hard to say if it would be different for Cragg if the history of the Old Testament were not so closely linked to his personal experience. We have seen that the ambiguity of a Jewish link to Christianity for Arab Christians is a stumbling block for Cragg, given the present political climate in the Middle East. Because of this alienation, Cragg has become sensitive to exclusive language, particularly in Christian Scriptures. Cragg's approach is to affirm that interactive revelation, conducted in an atmosphere of hospitality, unearths universal truths which lie beneath external exclusive dogmas.

We have suggested that Cragg's particular problem of ethnicity in Christian Scriptures, which we now see he partially answers through the hospitality of
the New Testament, could be approached in another way, and yet still be consistent with his theology (see Ch. 4, 5). Rather than seeing ethnicity as exclusive, God’s work through a particular people could be understood as an affirmation, by Cragg, of culture and people. What was for one in the Old Testament is now for all, and the way God dealt with the one helps us better understand his purposes now.

It is interesting to note that Cragg does not use the term ‘culture’ much, but that ‘ethnic’ or ‘ethnicity’ are quite common in his writings. The former conveys a positive understanding, while the latter, a negative, exclusive one. By looking for the universal and struggling against exclusivity so strongly, Cragg misses that important aspect of the Christian faith which affirms God working through each particular culture. We have noted how Lamin Sanneh interprets culture as instrumental and a vital part of a Christian understanding of the world. Bailey uses peasant culture in the Middle East as a common ground between Muslim and Christian. David Barrett has even documented that African Christian groups who rely heavily on the Old Testament and appear to be stretching the bounds of orthodoxy move towards the mainstream of Christianity when they have translated Scriptures. Their emphasis on the Old Testament gives them a particular identity as they begin to mix with the modern world. The Old Testament demonstrates God’s work through a particular culture. This has been one of its major traditional values to Christianity.

What Cragg has failed to note is the practical alternative to not accepting God’s work through a particular culture. The gospel cannot be removed from
culture and examined as a pure entity. In one sense Cragg acknowledges this when he argues for Christian hospitality to other faiths. It helps Christians see their own ethnicity. In a deeper sense, however, we argue that he rejects this, failing to pick up on positive aspects of culture as some theologians have done. His search for true revelation, and the universal principles in other faiths which link to this, is not dissimilar to the quest for a pure gospel, something which he would acknowledge is impossible to find given his understanding of revelation as interactive. Yet for Cragg this gospel lies beneath not just Christian Scriptures and Christian dogma but is latent in other faiths as well, though is best and only fully expressed in Christ on the cross. The emphasis on the universal, the rejection of ethnicity and the failure fully to develop the concept of God revealing that through the particularness of culture, sets Cragg's approach to the New Testament in a Quranic light.

We have noted that Cragg in several places rejects Schweitzer's quest for the historical Jesus behind Christian Scripture. Cragg's understanding of hospitality and the search for the true nature of revelation which grows out of that is, in fact, similar in nature to Schweitzer's quest. Questions of how Christianity could be so theological and exclusive lay behind Schweitzer's quest for the historical Jesus. He too poured out his life for people of another culture and religion. Similar questions motivate Cragg's quest for true revelation behind Christian Scriptures and the Qur'an. Finding a non-cultural gospel may be just as unattainable as Schweitzer's historical Jesus.
8. Cragg’s Exegesis of Christian Scriptures

Lamb summarises that Cragg offers ‘a coherent and biblically-grounded Christian theology of inter-faith relations.’ Biblical in what way? This chapter explores that question. Examples of conventional exegesis in Cragg’s writings are not common. By conventional exegesis, we mean

the act of explaining a text. . . . The explanation may include translation, paraphrase or commentary on the meaning. Its purpose may be either to describe the author’s meaning or to apply that meaning to a contemporary situation.

Cragg has done this with the Qur’an, particularly in his book *Readings in the Qur’an*, but not much with the Bible. Nevertheless his writings do contain some exegesis of Christian Scriptures. He does not, however, use a systematic approach where first a textual reading is established, then a reasoned translation, followed by commentary which includes an attempt to understand the intent of the author.

Cragg does do a certain amount of translation, paraphrase and commentary on Christian Scriptures, but his emphasis is on applying it to contemporary situations, particularly the situation of Christians engaging with Islam. Rarely does he make much attempt to understand what the text might have meant for the author. Most of this exegesis consists of using brief texts to make a

---

1 Lamb, *Call to Retrieval*, 172.
particular point, such as his interpretation of the Greek words ἐκπέτας and ἀποδοχή to demonstrate what he means by 'hospitality' (see 7.4.1, 7.4.2).

Given this lack of conventional exegesis in his writing, it is interesting that at times Cragg uses the term 'Bible study' when referring to some of his own writings. His first pamphlet series, 'Operation Reach' (1957-1962), he described as 'carrying a Bible study and a presentation of some central feature of Islam for reflection and testing in the circle of experience the recipients enjoyed' (Faith and Life Negotiate 1994, 124). Actual explanations of Christian theology and Christian Scriptures are considerably fewer than his explanations of Islam and its Qur'ān in this series. Much of the content on Islam in 'Operation Reach' was reworked into the book The Dome and the Rock (1964), where the biblical content featured less prominently than it did in the original series. It is clear that the point in both the series and the book was more to explain Islam to a Western Christian mind than it was to do exegesis on Christian Scriptures for what it might have to say about Islam.

The other three pamphlet series, which are less well-known, are of a similar nature to 'Operation Reach'. Although Cragg does not always refer to them as Bible studies, they do fit that category for him. About 'Emmaus Furlongs' (1962-1965) Cragg writes, 'Our Studies now have the same ambition [as 'Operation Reach'] but are set in a different form. In the place of outlines on Islam for Christian use, we take up outlines of Christianity for ourselves and, if they be so minded, for Muslims around us ('Emmaus Furlongs' No. 1, back cover).
‘The Mind of Christ’ was a brief, four-part series which followed ‘Emmaus Furlongs’. Cragg uses Philippians 2 as the starting point for the series, where Paul challenges believers to have the same mind as Christ. At the time of writing Cragg was assuming that the series would continue, as evidenced in his comments on the last page of No. 4, but it was aborted after just four issues. Thus there is a sense of incompleteness about this set of studies. ‘The Grace Cup’ (1979-1983) was the last of the pamphlet series which contained what we could call his Bible studies. Some of this material was obviously hastily written. The quality of reproduction was also quite poor, giving an overall bad impression. Nevertheless there are parts of this series which are useful for our study.

In addition to the pamphlet series, there are other examples of Bible studies in Cragg’s writing. A brief series called ‘Bible studies’ which were presented in Mombassa in 1979 (‘God and Man’ 1982, 2-16), are more theological treatises on familiar subjects than examples of exegesis. In the book Paul and Peter (1980) Cragg used Galatians 1:18, which mentions Paul’s visit to Peter, as the basis for an imaginative study. There are other examples of what Cragg would call Bible studies in other books as well. For instance The Privilege of Man (1968) has an account of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. But overall these are less common than one might expect. It should be noted that most of Cragg’s Bible study material was produced earlier in his life, and, as these are earlier writings, they also reflect earlier theological positions.
Later in his life Cragg developed his thinking into what he called 'theology in cross-reference' (*Christ and the Faiths* 1986). In her thesis I. J. Glaser gives high marks to Cragg for this, considering him to be one of the very few whose work relates to her own interest in comparative hermeneutics. Glaser's commendation, however, was not based on careful study of Cragg's methodology so much as his intention to do theology in cross-reference. Glaser herself meticulously explains her methodology as she dealt with varying Christian and Muslim interpretations of parts of Genesis. We argue below that a shortcoming in Cragg's exegetical approach to Christian Scriptures is that he does not begin with or continue in reliance on a particular text when he does what he calls Bible study.

Despite the fact that there is not a large amount of conventional exegetical material to choose from in Cragg's writings, our study would not be complete without some analysis and critique of Cragg's method in interpreting Christian Scriptures. To study this aspect of Cragg's writings we divide the chapter into two parts: the first notes Cragg's general approach to what he calls Bible study along with four aspects of his interpretative methods in Christian Scriptures. 'Emmaus Furlongs', the second pamphlet series of twenty separate Bible studies, introduces a large range of Christian theological topics. In this series Cragg uses a creative, but at times perhaps overly free, interpretation of certain words and phrases in the Luke 24 account of disciples on the road to Emmaus.

The second part of this chapter then considers his handling of particular texts.

---

3 Glaser, 'Comparative Hermeneutics,' 14.
8.1 General Exegetical Approach

8.1.1 The alert reader and Bible study

Cragg uses adjectives like ‘lively’ or ‘alert’ to include the reader as he makes points he considers to be clear but perhaps not immediately obvious. For instance he writes, ‘It is clear to any lively reader of the New Testament that St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians is a passionate and forthright document’ (‘Mind of Christ’ No. 3, p. 4). His book The Lively Credentials of God (1995), revolves around the concept of intelligent inquiry on the part of people seeking the ‘credentials’ of God. The adjective ‘alert’ is used in a similar way in both his earlier and his more recent writings. Two examples of such usage are: ‘This means that our theology must always be alert for the impulses of welcome’ (Christ and the Faiths 1986, 323), and ‘But in more alert perspective, is this well concluded?’ (Muhammad and the Christian 1984, 92).

In the usage cited above, both ‘alert’ and ‘lively’ denote an inquiring, interactive mind towards God and his universe where there are other human beings. They are also words Cragg uses to draw his readers along when he explains Christian Scriptures. Perhaps nowhere is this particular aspect of his exegesis more evident than in his pamphlet series ‘Emmaus Furlongs’. Cragg introduces a variety of theological topics through the use of certain words and phrases in the Lucan account of the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus with Jesus joining them in their discussion (Lk. 24.13-35). Their questions were answerable by Scriptures but needed that alert or lively mind in order to understand. ‘Emmaus Furlongs’ fits Cragg’s category of Bible study.
In ‘The World and the Word: The Sacrament of Scriptures’ (‘Grace Cup’ 1981, No. 9) Cragg has a section entitled ‘The Sacrament of Study’ (p. 8-10). In this he explains what he means by Bible study. By comparing his actual practice with this statement, we will note that his strengths and weaknesses in the area of his exegetical method are surprisingly apparent in this brief statement.

There are three characteristics of Cragg’s Bible studies. First, for Cragg, Bible study consists of a thematic rather than a textual approach to Christian Scriptures. Instead of dealing with textual questions and the intended meaning of the author, Cragg’s method is to begin with the theological points he wishes to make, only moving from there to the text. This observation of his methodology is not what he might see himself as doing. In the above mentioned ‘The Sacrament of Study’ he writes that in Bible study, ‘we must engage with the passage carefully’ (p. 8). Later he explains that this engagement often means looking for ‘a more subtle meaning’ (p. 8). This meaning can be found, not surprisingly, through ‘precedent’ (historical background) and ‘vocabulary’ (meanings of words) (p. 9). But Cragg also states, ‘If properly armed with grammar and imagination the sacrament of study yields continuing surprise and stimulus’ (p. 9). His use of the words ‘subtle’ and ‘imagination’ go hand in hand with his concept of being ‘alert’. Both are key to understanding his pick-and-choose approach to the texts and are an indication of his methodology.
Secondly, Cragg is surprisingly unquestioning about the texts of Christian Scriptures, particularly given his knowledge and acceptance of higher criticism and critical methods. In his statement on Bible study he dismisses textual questions with the comment 'for the most [part] scholarship has already done [the work] for us' (p. 8). We have earlier argued that Cragg's easy acceptance of the text is a result of his engagement with Islam and the Muslims' high view of their Qur'ān which Cragg generally has accepted at face value (see Ch. 2). Cragg's methodology is to invoke Scriptures to bolster his arguments but he does not seriously do exegesis on the texts. This is little different from how New Testament writers (as well as early Church Fathers) handled biblical texts. Like them Cragg brings his questions and theology to the text and seeks to find justification for them there. His approach has both strengths and weaknesses.

Goldingay in his two books *Models for Scripture* and *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* is a good example of a methodology for interpretation of Christian Scriptures which differs from that of Cragg. This approach to exegesis employs textual tools to gain understanding of the original meaning of the text to the eventual end of applicability. The potential shortcoming of this approach is that many scholars, intent on learning the original meaning, do not move to modern application. In this approach the process of exegesis is the appropriate vehicle for that interactive revelation Cragg believes is important.

---

4 See for instance Paul's quotation from the Old Testament in Galations 4:21-31 on Hagar and Sarah or 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 on idol feasts and the Lord's Supper.
Goldingay notes, however, that there is another approach which also has validity to it. This is where Christian Scriptures are searched for justification for a particular theological point of view. This is what Cragg does. The strength of this approach is that it is relevant to the contemporary scene and can uncover aspects of Christian Scriptures which were previously not seen. The danger, however, is that without proper discipline, Christian Scriptures can be made to say anything. Thus those who might have the expectation that Bible study should have some kind of critical analysis of the text and its meaning first, only then to be followed by application, would be disappointed in Cragg's methodology. On the other hand, he has gained world-wide recognition because the issues he brings to Christian Scriptures are of immediate, contemporary relevance. Most of those engaged in biblical exegesis have not addressed them.

Finally, a vital part of Bible study for Cragg is to stimulate his readers to have questioning, inquiring minds in their approach to the Christian faith and the Bible. This is demonstrated not only by the use of words 'lively' and 'alert' but also in the fact that questions are a central feature in each of the four pamphlet series, including 'Emmaus Furlongs', as well as his book *Paul and Peter*. These studies consist of references to Christian Scriptures coupled with interpretation of a theological concern (often Islam). Each study ends with a series of thematically arranged reflective study questions, set up in such a way as to be beneficial for groups to discuss. The point of the questions is not so much to learn information as it is to stimulate thoughtful reflection. Cragg begins his

---

explanation of Bible study in 'The Sacrament of Study' by making this very point.

The Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular, will not let us be sleeping partners. They demand an active partnership with their character as we have now reviewed it. We cannot go to the Bible like a telephone directory, or a railway guide, just 'to see what it says.' With these we do not have to engage reflectively or argumentatively. For they are 'authority' in a lifeless kind of way. They merely inform. With Scripture, by contrast, we must be alert, questioning, pondering, and discerning ('Grace Cup', No. 9, 8).

Thus when Cragg refers to 'Bible study' he generally means a combination of scriptural interpretation/application coupled to reflective questions for the reader. The thought process is what is important.

In summary, for Cragg Bible study is the study of a subject, not a text, although he seems to have a high view of the text to which he relates his study. The strength of this 'alert' or 'lively' approach is that he does not get stuck in only the original meaning. The danger is that he may misinterpret the text. Cragg does not use careful commentary and seeking the original meaning of the author in his exegesis. This approach is consistent with his understanding of the interactive nature of revelation. Revelation cannot be revelation unless it is received and that reception must be situational. Cragg's approach does at times, however, have the effect of making his interpretation of certain verses quite individual to him — even to the point of not being logically supported by the text.

Also Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures is one of considering the whole rather than the parts. It is more like a jeweller considering a string of pearls in
their beauty together rather than carefully examining any one minutely. In that sense one could argue that Cragg engages more in synchronic than diachronic study. Yet even this would not be an accurate assessment. For instance Cragg is surprisingly unmotivated to consider an author's overall theological perspective in any particular New Testament book. It is not that he is unaware of the issues, as he occasionally does refer to them. It is rather that he simply does not take this into account in his arguments. What particular work he does undertake on a text is used to develop a theological position. We now consider four aspects of the work Cragg does on a text. These consist of speculation about meanings of words, poetry, imagination, and a particular, quite traditional homiletical style. The overall result of these leads to some unusual interpretations in what Cragg calls Bible study.

8.1.2 Use of biblical languages

Cragg occasionally uses Greek and, still less frequently, Hebrew in his references to Christian Scriptures. In the majority of instances where he does refer to the original languages, however, it is to make an unusual theological or devotional point. The result is that the argument Cragg makes is sometimes not well served by the text, if the reader makes the effort to check meanings and context. For instance, in the Luke 24 Emmaus road passage, Cragg writes of verse 32 that 'No one would like to part with the exclamation about the burning hearts.' He expresses his confidence that manuscript evidence is almost unanimous for that reading. Then, not giving the actual

---

* See, for instance *Jesus and the Muslim* 1985, 82-86 on Gospel formation.
words so the readers can have some chance of judging for themselves, he
speculates:

Yet, for all that, the slightest variant of a copyist's pen and we have the
Aramaic for 'heavy' instead of 'aglow'. It is possible to let the two meanings
penetrate each other . . . .

How much of the world is like this! How much the Gospel has to bear with
the impediments to recognition that belong with the familiarities of
thought. Men's eyes are held by the shape of their own outlook. Yet there
are intimations of truth within the very sources of confusion. Compassion
must always temper the form of our intercourse with Men's dulness or
error, since even their perversity sets the context of our ministry ('Emmaus
Furlongs' No. 1, 11-12).

The usage of καίομενον from καίω is, in fact, somewhat obscure, and this has
led to some textual discrepancies: thus Cragg's reference to 'almost unanimous'
manuscript evidence. The idiom of a burning heart, in the past, has been
considered unidiomatic Greek, giving rise to speculation regarding other
meaning. More recently, however, commentators have argued for the more
literal sense which the texts have been passed down to us. Keen on a
theological point, Cragg makes use of a now generally unaccepted minority
position of interpretation. In this particular instance it appears he may have
relied on C. C. Torrey's postulation that there was a confusion of the Aramaic
yaqqîr, meaning 'heavy' with yâqêd, 'burning'. The slight difference between

---


8 See for instance, John Nolland's Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W.

Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1978, 898, for alerting me to Torrey's interpretation. It appears,
however, that Marshall was in error as to the nature of the difference between the two Aramaic
words which he attributed to Torrey. He cites the potential error as being in the first letter, a
dalet instead of a yodh, thus noting the difference as yaqqir versus daqqir. Torrey postulated
that it was in the last letter between daleth and resh. Kittel (Vol. 3, 464) independently notes
the same problem about the text, commenting the difference, like Torrey, as yaqqîr versus yaqêd.
Standard lexicons support Torrey's translation, not Marshall's. Brown, Driver and Briggs gives
the meaning of daqqir as 'pierce' or 'stab' (p. 201) while yaqqîr is 'precious' or 'weighty' (p. 429).
Yâqêd carries the meaning of 'burning' (p. 428). Marcus Jastrow is in essential agreement with
the shapes of the letters *daleth* and *resh* is even less noticeable in the Aramaic-
Hebrew script of the first three centuries than it was later.\(^{10}\) The small dash off
the upper right corner of the letter to make it a *daleth* as opposed to a *resh* was
not a distinguishing feature at that time, making it even easier for there to be
an error of interpretation. Torrey argues that the unidiomatic expression in
verse 32 is in contrast to a strikingly similar idiomatic expression for 'heavy
hearts' in verse 25. This coupled with easy possible confusion from the
Aramaic leads Torrey to make a different translation of this verse.\(^{11}\) His
theory, however, has not been generally accepted in New Testament
scholarship, as other evidence for this type of usage in the Greek has been
argued by some scholars since, for example Marshall.

Cragg accepts the traditional reading and translation but most extraordinarily
speculates about a synthesis of meaning between it and a quite distinctly
divergent reading based on *yaqqîr*. He makes the important theological point
that the travail and reward of theological understanding are interminably
linked. While this point may be perfectly true, it cannot be deduced from the
text. One can only interpret the verse one way or the other, unless some other
argument were presented such as the hypothesis that *yaqqîr* and *yâqêd* are
etymologically related. There is no evidence for this and Cragg does not take it
up. There are many New Testament words whose meanings would change
dramatically through the alteration of one letter. For Cragg to take the

\(^{10}\) See the fold-out 'Table of Alphabets' in E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* , rev. A. E.

traditional understanding of καίω but then speculate on its having both the meanings 'heavy' and 'aglow' is a highly unusual and, we argue, suspect methodology.

There are aspects of this exegetical style which are not far from the way some conservative Christians handle biblical text. For some within the Christian tradition the Bible is somehow magically 'God's Word' no matter how it is handled or interpreted. A promise box of verses which can be drawn for each day is one example. Usually taken entirely out of context, the verse is then applied to a current life situation, with an application which has little to do with the original meaning. In this instance Cragg's unquestioning acceptance of the text coupled with an interpretation which brings together two divergent understandings based on speculation about Aramaic words, bears remarkable similarities to the magical text approach used by some branches of popular, conservative Christianity. By invoking the Bible in the theological points he makes, Cragg appeals to the one universally recognised authority of Christendom and in so doing moves the grounds of debate off the speculative philosophical ideas of an individual (himself) onto a 'higher', more universal plane. Thus, his theological insights are not just his own, but become the true meaning of the Bible. Herein lies the problem. Quoting the Bible gives added weight to his arguments but it is not a fair weight, since the author's meaning often is not of particular importance to Cragg in his exegesis. In this sense at least, one has to question the extent to which his writing really is 'biblically based.'
8.1.3 Scripture as poetry

In the exegesis of this same passage, Cragg gives a further reason why ‘No one would like to part with the exclamation about the burning hearts’ (v. 32). He writes, ‘For we are entirely certain that it is poetically right and manuscript evidence is almost unanimous’ (‘Emmaus Furlongs’, No. 1, p. 11). For Cragg ‘manuscript evidence’ plays a secondary role to the response of the heart where the reader does not ‘want’ to give it up and that ‘poetically’ it makes sense. These are listed before the manuscript evidence as reasons for a particular interpretation. Thus we argue, poetry takes a high place in Cragg’s understanding of Christian Scriptures and Christian theology. Cragg himself is something of a poet. He likes to quote poetry in his writing. We have seen how he responds to the poetic style of the Qur’an as a part of revelation. Cragg’s inclination towards a ‘high’ Arabic translation of Christian Scriptures, we have argued, is a carry over from his understanding the Qur’an as revelation and his understanding of the nature of revelation.

But poetry as a part of revelation is more than a personal matter for Cragg. In describing W. C. Smith’s general theological approach, Cragg is his most negative when charging Smith for ignoring poetry and the aesthetic side of life. In describing a distinctive of Smith’s theological method, Cragg writes that in Smith’s writing there is an ‘almost total absence of the poetic. It is rare to find any quotation from poetry, art or drama which might kindle and

---

12 For example see Poetry of the Word at Christmas 1987.
illuminate the imagination or suggest an affinity of meaning emotionally shared and sublimely registered’ (Troubled by Truth 1992, 244).

Thus the reasoning which poetry conveys is every bit as important as the reasoning of the logical mind for Cragg. This emphasis on poetry whose meaning is ‘emotionally shared and sublimely registered’ is carried over into the free use of the imagination when Cragg interprets Christian Scriptures as we illustrated above in the Emmaus Road passage.

8.1.4 Imagination (typology)

By tying creative imagination into Christian Scriptures, theological concepts can be given a greater authority than if they are reasoned apart from Scriptures. Cragg used imagination in his interpretation of ‘burning heart’ in Luke 24:32 above. The reader is called to imagine the possibility of a slip of the pen between two Aramaic words whose spellings are very close. But when Cragg utilises what he calls ‘imagination’ in his interpretation of Christian Scriptures it is usually not so much imagining a changed text or details of stories or events in Scripture which are not in the text. Rather he calls for a lively imagining of what theological implications there might be in modern circumstances where the setting is quite different. This is not unlike the typologies Paul used in Galatians 4 and 1 Corinthians 10 cited above. We, however, use his own word, ‘imagination’, rather than ‘typology’.

A good example of Cragg’s use of imagination is found in his ‘Emmaus Furlongs’. Cragg develops a theological point on the basis of the fact that the
second disciple with Cleopas is not named. ‘Yet the silence about the name invites us to imagine new identities. And the one we are most in need and duty bound to put there is the Muslim. We live with him day by day’ ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 1, p. 5). On this basis, Cragg answers the questions the disciples had of Jesus about the nature of his Messiahship and the crucifixion in a way that Christians living in a Muslim context could understand. The issues and questions on which Jesus must have expounded, according to Cragg, are ones Muslims and Christians living in a Muslim cultural context would have. Throughout the series friend 'X', as Cragg refers to him, represents the Muslim perspective on the theological questions being raised. For instance he writes

'Ought not the Messiah to have suffered these things?' He queried, in a question plainly awaiting the answer: 'Yes! He ought.' Whereas every instinct of the disciples, and of Israel, would have phrased the question expecting the answer: 'No! He ought not.' ... In the sense of that question, the whole of Islam walks the Emmaus road in the company of Cleopas ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 2, p. 10).

It is interesting to note that this creative approach has been picked up in at least one other significant place in the evangelical world. A major compendium publication edited by a professor from Fuller Theological Seminary in California, borrowed this overall theme for Christian theological articles relating to Islam.13

Another example of Cragg's use of imagination is in his book Paul and Peter which is based on Galatians 1:18. There his whole interpretative framework is built on imagining aspects of what the content of the meeting between Paul

13Woodbury, Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road.
and Peter might have been. At one point he writes several pages of imaginary conversation between the two (p. 42-48). Peter, Jesus' disciple, was a missionary to the Jews. Paul had developed a ministry to the Gentiles. What did each have to bring to this particular meeting? But most of the book is spent on building from a lively, imaginative interpretation launched from a single verse into a theology for Christian-Muslim relations today.

**8.1.5 A homiletical style**

In his early writings, Cragg uses a homiletical style recognisable in preachers of his generation. This style is not as apparent in later writing. Cragg takes key words and phrases and from them builds a range of applications. He uses this same style for part of his *The Call of the Minaret* which is based on the words and phrases from the Muslims' *kalima* (lit. 'the word' used to mean the testimony of faith or *shahâdah*). Sometimes he uses various techniques, such as an unusual use of a common term, to help jog the memory of his readers so they can more easily recall certain issues he raises. This homiletical style is evident in the above examples we gave. We give one more example below, again beginning with 'Emmaus Furlongs'.

Cragg speculates on the location of Emmaus, wondering if a close name in Arabic, 'Imwâs, is one and the same as the Emmaus of Luke's account ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 1, p. 9). The reason for this historic interlude is

---

14 For instance his unusual use of 'sacrament' in 'Grace Cup', No. 9, listed as the sacraments of experience, writing, study, preaching and personality.

made quickly obvious after he establishes that 'Emmaus' is too far from Jerusalem for disciples easily to walk it in one day. This fact is made into a homiletical point by Cragg. In answering his own question, 'How far was Emmaus?', he writes, 'The furlongs to Emmaus pass through a map of the soul, whatever the exact distance of road and track they covered on the hills' (p. 10). It is a distance and it has to be taken step by step. From this application his use of 'furlongs' in the title of the series becomes obvious. A furlong is a shorter, identifiable distance. It is a measurable stage in a longer journey. Cragg's speculation on where the road might pass is more than the scenery or buildings which might mark a political occupation by Rome. The landmarks are also 'vicissitudes of memory and the exegesis of the prophets' (p. 10). Cragg further uses the imagery of the road to explain how Jesus is present on another but actually the same road.

But he is on a road which is now, in the lapse of the centuries, peopled by new folk and stretching through fresh scenes. Islam, some six centuries on, re-opened in retrospect those themes with which Cleopas and 'x' went out from Jerusalem. The days of our time run through different noons to other evenings. Yet Jesus as the Christ, the clue to God and man, is still the light of opened hearts (p. 12).

Through this imaginative use of words and phrases from the Bible, we further see how Cragg builds the organisational framework for his series of twenty Bible studies.

'Emmaus Furlongs' and other Bible study writings of Cragg's contain many similar examples of the above. For instance, Cragg uses the words 'Jesus himself . . . with them' ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 2, p. 12) to make significant points on the nature of the developing relationship between Jesus and the two disciples. 'All the prophets' ('Emmaus Furlongs', No. 5, p. 5) Cragg uses to
introduce the issue of the narrowness of the Jewish tradition from which the
Christian faith has come, if it is to be something which has claims for the
whole world. Similarly in Paul and Peter Cragg introduces the cross through
the words 'him — there'. The series, 'The Mind of Christ' is begun with the
Philippians 2 passage which begins with the words 'Have this mind'. These are
to name just a few. There are others. What they all share in common is an
approach which is an overview but is built from significant individual words.
The flow and thrust of the full text is less noticed than a theologising based on
key words or phrases.

Thus we can summarise that Cragg's view of the texts of Christian Scriptures is
conservative. His method of interpretation has a traditional, but at the same
time, creative homiletical style which is consistent with his own
understanding of revelation. While this is understandable given his approach
of coming to Christian Scriptures to demonstrate a point, it is a weakness in
his theological method. Some of his interpretations are individual and
idiosyncratic. This is because Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures while
traditional, is uncritical. Because Cragg quotes the Bible his readers are left with
the implication that this is the meaning of the text. Yet Cragg is not doing a
study of the texts. He uses the biblical texts to give a veneer of authority to his
theological statements. Many of his unusual interpretations spring from
questions he has considered in his engagement with Islam as we see below
when we consider specific passages which Cragg interprets.
8.2 The Interpretation of Biblical Texts

Cragg’s treatment of the account of the disciples on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24, though not conventional exegesis, is nevertheless one place where he builds a series of links and an interpretative framework to one particular passage of Christian Scriptures. We now consider some cases where Cragg goes more fully into the text of Christian Scriptures. We wanted to choose passages from different parts of Christian Scriptures to give a representative sampling of Cragg’s methodology. This has not been possible due to the shortage of available examples. For instance, although Cragg quotes from the Psalms, the Prophets, Wisdom literature, Genesis and infrequently from the historical narratives, exegesis from the Old Testament is almost non-existent in his writings. Cragg’s attraction to vivid imagery does lead, however, to the occasional exception such as Moses and the burning bush and Jacob wrestling with the angel (‘Emmaus Furlongs’, No. 5, p. 8-9) but there is not enough material in his dealing with the Old Testament to analyse. The four passages we have chosen include:

1. a parable the two sons, Luke 15:11-32
2. an event in Jesus’ life demoniac of the Gaderenes, Mark 4:1-20
3. an account from Acts Peter’s vision, Acts 10
4. a passage from an Epistle 2 Corinthians 1:15-20

There is less material in the latter two but they were chosen because they represent different parts of Christian Scriptures. In our analysis, we primarily use commentary information from about the period when Cragg was writing as that more accurately reflects the state of biblical scholarship of that time.
8.2.1 Luke 15:11-32 The parable of the two sons

Cragg deals significantly with only two parables in the New Testament. One is the parable of the two sons\(^{16}\) and the other, more briefly, is the parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants (Mark 1:1-12, Mt. 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-18).\(^{17}\) On initial consideration, it may seem surprising that Cragg does not write on the parables more than he does. His other references to parables are mostly limited to only brief comments. Even these brief references to the parables are disproportionately fewer compared to other citations from Scriptures. More than one-third of all Jesus' recorded teaching in the New Testament comes in the form of parables. Cragg's imaginative style it would seem should be inclined towards these teachings of Jesus which are so creatively pregnant with meaning. People in relational societies, which includes much of the Muslim world, are responsive to this method of theological communication.

On reflection, however, this fits with his theological presuppositions. Some of the seemingly harshest sayings of Jesus about the Kingdom of God and the destruction of non-believers are contained in the parables. These are quite far from his idea of hospitality of the gospel.

Cragg's inclination towards a higher literary form for Scripture and poetry as a part of revelation could be one reason the parables are not better represented in his writing. Although they often have application to the educated and

---

\(^{16}\) This is the name Cragg chooses to give the parable. Although there are other references, primary treatment is in 'Grace Cup', No. 1 and in The Privilege of Man, 139-143.
religious leaders, they are theology from everyday life for the common man. In contrast, Kenneth Bailey has come to the parables and events in the New Testament, seeing them through a peasant's eyes.

Thirdly, Cragg's approach to Christian Scriptures generally does not begin with the text on its own terms. Rather, he brings his theology to the text and, often through proof-texting, makes his points. This is less possible to do with the parables, perhaps, than with other aspects of New Testament teaching. A parable of Jesus demands its audience on its own terms. Through the use of parables Jesus confounded the theological categories of the religious leaders of his time. Because of their metaphorical theology, it is hard to proof-text from the parables.

Despite this difficulty of proof-texting from the parables, Cragg uses the parable of the two sons to make his own theological points. While his explanation does have some relation to more common interpretations of the text, nevertheless it is quite distinctive. In the midst of developing his stretching explanations he does have a moment of self-awareness about his exegetical method. He writes, 'It may be possible, even proper, exegetically, to silence these questions by the plea that parables have explicit purposes and that we cannot hold them to obligations wider than their central lessons' (Privilege of Man 1968, 144). Ignoring this point, however, he continues to draw from the parable his full understanding of the nature of the gospel of Jesus and the nature of its subsequent community, the church.

The fullest treatments are found in 'Grace Cup', No. 17, p. 10 and 'Emmaus Furlongs', No. 5, p 13.
Both Marshall and Blomberg give a summary of interpretation of the parable most of which Cragg would have had access to when he was writing. Marshall notes that ‘Of all the parables this one is perhaps the easiest to interpret in broad outline and yet the most open to a variety of interpretation, dependent on where the main emphasis is thought to lie.’ In brief summary the point of the parable, as traditionally understood according to Marshall and Blomberg, is the justification of God’s attitude towards wayward sinners and a vindication of Jesus’ actions towards receiving sinners.

Joachim Jeremias, who first argued for a double meaning to the parable, notes that the point Jesus is making is a Christological statement about himself. He sees the key to understanding the parable of the two sons (or as he prefers to call it, ‘the parable of the love of God’) as lying in the second half with the rather startling story of the elder son. Jeremias argues that Luke 15:11-22 is ‘primarily an apologetic parable, in which Jesus vindicates his table companionship with sinners against his critics.’ In so doing he is equating himself with God who also receives such treatment. Jeremias argues, ‘Jesus thus claims that in his actions the love of God to the repentant sinner is made effectual.’ The parable contains a veiled Christological assertion that Jesus is God. From a contemporary perspective, Nolland has little to add to the history

---

18 For a summary history of arguments over single, double or triple meaning for this parable, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1990, 172-3.
22 Emphasis original; *ibid.*
of the parable's interpretation. As we see below, Cragg, by coming to the parable with a particular theological issue in mind, reads more of the complete gospel message into the parable than other interpreters of his time.

In Cragg’s first exposition of Luke 15:11-32 in *The Privilege of Man* he is concerned with what he calls ‘the privilege of man’. This privilege of man is demonstrated in the creation story from the Bible and in Islam through the concept of the *khalīfah* (‘successor’ or ‘viceroy’, the historical designation of the temporal ruler of the *dār-ul-islām* [lit. ‘House of Islam’ meaning a universal, temporal, Muslim Caliphate]). We briefly digress here to consider Cragg’s interpretation of the *khalīfah* as found in the Qur’ān.

Earlier in *The Privilege of Man* Cragg argued that the two key verses in the Qur’ān (Surah 2:30 and 38:26) have been misunderstood. Despite the fact that there is some classical discussion of humanity as *khalīfah*, most Muslim commentators have interpreted the references to the *khalīfah* to be spiritual sanction to the temporal (political) head of the *dār-ul-islām*. This interpretation is indeed how the designation came to be known in history. Cragg believes that it should be otherwise, siding with the minority view in classical discussion and the more recent neo-orthodox interpretation. Through his exegesis of the Quranic texts he argues they mean that the *khalīfah* means the viceregency of *all* human beings.

It is for this reason that there is more than a simple error of exegesis in the view that mistakenly assumes that political rule in succession to the Prophet is the sense of the *khalīfah*, or viceregency, of Adam…. It is a perversion to regard the Islamic privilege of man as somehow capable of

---

being interpreted, still less achieved, in this external, political expression (Privilege of Man 1968, 30).

With this interpretation, Cragg links the Quranic concept of man as *khalīfah* with the biblical one. 'If, without strain, we can in this way link the Quranic Adam with the biblical in a comparable sense of man, it will be right cautiously to fit this Islamic dictum: "God is and man is His caliph" into the poetry of Psalm 8' (Privilege of Man 1968, 43). It is this that is the starting point for Cragg in his first interpretation of Luke 15:11-32.

[The parable] begins with the natural sonship and the sense of 'property', of man as participating in a material inheritance in a context of relatedness — man with the right to ownership, standing in the sequence of the generations, awaiting from the past and expecting towards the future. This is, plainly, the elemental 'caliphate' in parable form, man in physical birth and economic possession (ibid., 139).

Thus the agenda Cragg brings to the parable of the two sons is his understanding about the nature of sonship. The existence of the two sons in relationship to the father is a *khalīfah* relationship, with privileges as well as duties and responsibilities. This is a creative, albeit unusual interpretation, the implications for which we discuss below.

The second interesting slant Cragg gives is when he asserts that the son who leaves is leaving not just God but community as well. Here Cragg considers the nature of community. Community does not consist of temporal institutions or even fellowships. Cragg postulates that the exclusivity found in many of Christianity's institutions is little different than the Islamic concept of 'state'.

The Church, for all its brave Gospel about a universal sonship and a supra-racial family, has in fact allowed history to give it sharply national form and deeply cultural monopoly by race. Are not long stretches of 'the
new covenant as privately ethnic as the old? Are there not whole eras of the Christian Church . . . taking a fully Islamic character vis-à-vis the political order? Is not the doctrine of the two realms a sort of Meccan/Medinan theme without a Hijrah? (Ibid., 145).

Both are equally like the faraway land to which the younger son flees. The prodigal who leaves God finds a false solace in rigid institutions which exclude others. Both the Islamic state and exclusive institutions of Christianity are self-imposed exile from God and his universal welcome. Much of Christianity must return to true sonship just as much as Islam must come to it, according to Cragg. He then explains the nature and meaning of this return. ‘But if their repudiation is to be right it must return . . . to the criteria of their origin and their essential nature. And this, in Christianity, brings us back to sonship, Christ’s and ours’ (ibid., 139).

The third significant aspect to Cragg’s interpretation is in seeing the cross of Christ in the parable. ‘There stands . . . a sort of cross at the heart of the story’ (ibid., 141). The cross is present, according to Cragg, in the suffering of the father which occurred because of the unbroken relationship, even though the son had left his house.

Had the father cursed, disowned, repudiated him, banished the thought of him, or vowed revenge, there could be no returning. Yet these are the only alternatives which could have evaded or smothered or avoided the grief. Precisely in that he does not sever the bonds, the father continues to suffer. That continuity of suffering is then the ground and price of restoration . . . What this means in one inclusive sign the Christian faith has learned to identify in Christ crucified (ibid., 141-2).

Finally Cragg’s interpretation of the father’s invitation to the elder son who has rejected his brother’s return is worth mention: “this thy brother” is a truth of flesh. Whatever the personal, or racial, history of the members of the
common family character of humanity persists' (ibid., 142). This relates to
Cragg's understanding of the nature of community mentioned above. For
Cragg the father's plea is an invitation to the community of repentance. It is
not just a natural response, but an essential follow-on for the church.

This ... is the very calling of the Church whose business, in joy, is to be the
common society of men in birth and in grace. It is also in both its elements
the meaning of the imitation of Christ, in whom faith sees a sharing of our
human community and a bearing of our human sin and, by both acts,
reconciling men to God and to themselves and giving that reconciliation its
self-perpetuating sphere in new community (ibid., 142).

Twelve years later, Cragg introduced the 'Grace Cup' series with a Bible study
on the same passage.24 Writing only for Christians in the context of the
western church, Cragg gives a similar interpretation but with different
emphases. He divides the study into five parts. We mention each briefly to
demonstrate his methodology.

Not surprisingly he begins by pointing out that the parable is true 'literary art'.
The artistry of the story is 'like painting the lily'. Noting a tradition that Luke
was a poet, Cragg points out parts he believes to have come from the poetic
side of Luke: 'Two sons'; 'the fatted calf'; 'this thy son'; 'this thy brother' (p. 2).

Secondly, Cragg develops what he calls 'Background Detail' where he
references Deut. 21:17 and the nature of inheritance laws. He also gives a brief
definition of the three Greek words for servant or slave, δουλους (vs. 22), a
subordinate slave or servant παιδας (Luke 12:45) and the son's 'your hired

---

24 'Grace Cup', No. 1. Page numbers are not given for this pamphlet so when references to pages
are made, they have been counted, starting from 1.
help μισθίον (vs. 19), the latter being day labour with no rights at all in the home.

The third part Cragg entitles 'The Human Experience' which develops an understanding of the parable from the younger son's experience, the father's ongoing love and the older brother's rejection of the returned son. The interpretation here is very similar to the one Cragg gave in The Privilege of Man where he focused on the nature of rebellion and restoration.

The fourth part of Cragg's exegesis he labels as an 'Historical Perspective'. Here Cragg deals with a range of issues including the nature of the New Testament, even touching on scholarship which throws doubts on the documents. (Cragg takes a conservative position on this.) The main point here for Cragg is the application to community to which Jesus' listeners are called in the second part, or elder brother portion of the parable.

Here, then, is clear (shall we call it a 'Christian') implication in the story, a new focus of faith where the nature of God, rather than a symbol of His rule and worship, is the final haven of the heart. And, precisely because the Father is waiting down any lane of human search and penitence, all locations of privilege or privacy are obsolete (p. 9).

Cragg concludes his second exegesis of the parable of the two sons with a section on 'Divine Significance' where he explains how the message of the cross is present in the parable. Here his theological interpretation of the parable is developed more fully than it was earlier.

What is known to the son as self-seeking is known to the father as sorrow. Bound together as they are in the bundle of life, the same events spell guilt for the one and grief for the other. Then how the other takes the grief, namely in a love that forgives, is the vital clue to the redemption of the evil.
So the Cross, unseen, is very much at the heart of the story. For there, too, we have both evil and guilt on the one part, and pain and compassion on the other.

... For grace always waits on acceptance. If forgiveness could be otherwise, then either it would not be necessary or it would not be true. Meanwhile, it waits for us with ‘the best robe’ to clothe our unworthiness, a ring to reinstate us into sonship, shoes for our feet and the household’s merry ‘symphony’ (vs. 25) echoing out into the field to the surprise (and sadly the anger) of the self-righteous (p. 11).

There is a direct causal link between the action of the son and the response of the father. The same event which makes the son guilty causes the father grief. Although there are slightly different methodologies and emphases, Cragg’s interpretation remains basically the same for both treatments of the parable.

There can be no doubt that a prior agenda has influenced Cragg’s interpretation of the parable. First, Cragg does not refer to the context of chapter 15. Luke has included two other parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep, which he obviously considers to have the same theme. In contrast, Jeremias, in his treatment of the parables of Jesus, does the opposite of Cragg. He tries to get the whole picture from the texts in the Gospels, seeing themes between parables. Of the first two parables in Luke 15 Jeremias concludes,

“... This is Jesus’ defence of the gospel: ‘since God’s mercy is so infinite that his supreme joy is in forgiving, my mission as Saviour is to wrest his prey from Satan and to bring home the lost.’ Once again, Jesus — as God’s representative.”

While Cragg has a high Christology, a statement of Jesus about himself is not in his interpretation. Suffering prophethood and associating this with Islam is more of a concern for him.

— Jeremias, Parables of Jesus, 136.
To illustrate Cragg's particular slant further, we turn to Kenneth Bailey's interpretation of the parable. Bailey attributes his interest in Luke 15:11-22 to Cragg. He describes it as a thirty-year love affair.

The love affair began in the late '50s in Jerusalem where I heard Bishop Kenneth Cragg lecture. . . . Bishop Cragg explained to us that the parable of the prodigal son featured prominently in the confrontations [between Christians and Muslims]. Muslim scholars noted that the prodigal left home and then returned to it with no assistance. As traditionally interpreted, the parable has no cross, no suffering, no incarnation, and no mediator.

As a young listener to the bishop's lectures I went into shock. This parable is the most comprehensive statement from Jesus about how people are reconciled to God! Are all hints of the atonement missing from it? Was Jesus a good Muslim, and did St. Paul make a Christian out of him? As regards this parable, what could be said about the mind of Jesus on the question of the atonement? Did these questions have answers? 26

Bailey went on to attribute his first insights for a solution to the problem as coming from Cragg and his observation that there are hints of the cross in the parable. 27 After much careful study, Bailey came to believe there was more.

Besides lectures which have been formally recorded on audio and videotape, Bailey has published two full treatments of the parable. There are several ways in which his exegesis differs from Cragg's.

First, his earliest publication, The Cross and the Prodigal (1973), which came ten years after he first heard Cragg on this subject, was an exegesis that attempted to explain how Middle Eastern peasant culture might interpret the parable of the two sons. Secondly, in The Cross and the Prodigal and in Finding the Lost, Bailey began his exegesis by considering the whole of Luke 15, not just the third parable like Cragg. Thirdly, Bailey argues for his

26 Bailey, Finding the Lost, 1.
interpretative method in the parable, rather than just noting the problem and then ignoring it. Cragg, as we have seen, notes the issue but then ignores it. Fourthly, in his earlier exegesis after setting the stage by interpreting the whole of Luke 15, Bailey puts the parable of the two sons into the form of a drama. In this process, he claims to 'use dramatics as a disciplined tool of exegesis' in order to 'communicate the emotional content of [the] parable.' It could very well be that this idea came from Temple Gairdner (see 3.3.7). Bailey wrote this when he was in Egypt. Finally, in his second exegesis published twenty years later, he argues that there is a link with the twenty-third Psalm to Luke 15 and to the parable of the lost son.

Despite these differences, Bailey and Cragg share at least one important interpretative position on the parable, a position which is a distinctive for them. They both see the cross as a central feature in the father. Contemporary authors of Cragg's writing like Jeremias, as well as modern writers like Marshall, Nolland and Blomberg who summarise earlier scholarship on the parable, make no mention of the cross. Bailey's more systematic methodology, however, leads him to an understanding of that cross which is significantly different from Cragg's. This difference begins with Bailey insisting on taking the parable in the context of the whole of Luke 15. Because he takes the chapter as a unit, he sees the action on the part of the God as a key element in each of the three parables. In the parable of the lost coin, the woman vigorously searches for it. In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd leaves the flock to go back and search. In each case the vigorous

---

27 Ibid.
28 Bailey, Cross and the Prodigal, 9.
activity of God is emphasised. In the third parable, Bailey notes that the father in the parable runs to meet the younger son. He comes out of the banquet to plead with the older son. Both would be unheard of cultural responses, Bailey argues. What is more, in Bailey's drama the older son actually takes a stick and beats the father. Bailey's emphasis of seeing the parables through peasant eyes has sensitised him to how the father's actions would be interpreted by Jesus' listeners. In contrast, the father's action is not an emphasis for Cragg. 'The father's hospitality can act as well as wait. But either way there is expenditure by which it saves' (Privilege of Man 1968, 141-2).

Bailey, coming at the parable 'though peasant eyes', sees the same costly action on the part of God in the parable of the two sons as he does in the other two parables of Luke 15. Cragg does not, although he utilises his imagination to read meaning into the parable traditional interpreters have not. It is possible Cragg simply missed the cultural implications of the father's actions. On the other hand by ignoring the other two parables of Luke 15, which clearly demonstrate God vigorously acting to redeem, the emphasis on God's action is greatly lessened. Cragg has not come to the text critically. He has come imaginatively and that imagination has been sparked by his engagement with Islam. A God who suffers through waiting fits a theology which Islam could better understand. There is no need for an atonement. God is merciful and receives those who submit to him. He does not have to act.

39 Ibid., 128. Interestingly Blomberg accepts Bailey's interpretation that the father's action would be unheard of in Middle Eastern culture and thus was a conscious point Jesus was seeking to make. He does not, however, mention the cross. Interpreting the Parables, 176.
Thus, although both see the cross in the parable and Bailey even acknowledges getting that idea from Cragg, there is a significant difference in their understanding. Bailey, too, utilises his imagination, which has been sparked by cultural sensitivity — thus the older son beating the father in the drama. But, unlike Cragg, he also comes to the text critically. If it is correct to see the cross in this parable, Bailey’s interpretation is, perhaps, more logically consistent than Cragg’s. It could be argued that if Cragg sees the suffering of the cross in the parable, Bailey sees not just the suffering of the cross but also the crucifixion and a substitutionary atonement through God’s actions to redeem. The cross is more than the suffering of a waiting, loving father. Cragg’s abhorrence for words like ‘unique’ in describing Christianity arises out of his reaction to exclusivity. One has to ask if the idea of an actively redeeming God bears connotations for Cragg of some being left out whom God has not pursued. There could be an element of election in such an interpretation. A suffering, waiting father symbolising the cross and a repentant son are more compatible with his theology of the hospitality of the gospel.

There is no doubt that Cragg’s engagement with Islam has led him to find the cross in the parable of the two sons. Both he and Bailey stretch the boundaries of traditional scholarship in interpretation for the text. Bailey, however, also approaches the text critically and is more logically consistent in a full application. Cragg’s engagement with Islam, while freeing him possibly to see a new aspect to the parable, has, at the same time, restricted his interpretation.\(^\text{30}\)

\(^{30}\) It might be argued that Bailey’s is a more Presbyterian interpretation of the atonement which stresses the action of God and so is related to predestination.
8.2.2 Mark 5:1-20 The demoniac of the Gadarenes

Cragg uses Mark's account of Jesus' miracle of healing the demoniac as the basis for the fourth and last in his series 'The Mind of Christ' (Autumn 1972). The reason for his choice in the fourth study ties in with the theme of the series. A man, the demoniac, whose mind was not right was healed through Jesus' intervention. Many witnessed him sitting at the feet of Jesus 'in his right mind'.

Difficulties with interpretation of this account lie in the dual areas of understanding the kind of confrontation this was and then its meaning. For instance both Cranfield and later Lane comment on the state of mind before and after as being the key to understanding the significance of this event in the Gospels. The original condition of the demoniac was utterly dehumanising. Lane argues that Mark's description was intended to fit the Talmud's four criteria for insanity. Virtually all attempt to deal with an understanding of Mark's view of the demonic. Specific points are taken up below in comparison to Cragg's interpretation.

Cragg's homiletical style is apparent from the very beginning. He focuses on one phrase, 'What do you want with me, Jesus?' (vs. 7) which he uses as the point of origin for a range of theological issues, many of which are hardly related to the passage in any sense which conventional exegesis would.

---

32 Lane, Mark, 1975, 182, n. 7.
recognise. Secondly, for Cragg, the encounter with Jesus is vital. Revelation must be situational. 'It is all too easy for us, in our sense of the Gospel, to abstract it, in creeds, or dogmas, or liturgies, from the harsh conflicts of the living world' (p. 3). This vivid story is the starting point for personal encounter with Jesus, for, Cragg argues, 'the New Testament never describes a belonging that requires no encounter with Jesus' (p. 5).

Finally Cragg's imagination takes him beyond the setting near the ten cities of the Decapolis into the modern Middle East. 'Our study intends to use the question [What do you want with me, Jesus?] with a wider range than the story alone' (p. 3). Naturally this moves him towards Islam and not just Christianity.

The study is divided into four sections with the customary questions at the end. Cragg entitles the first section 'The Unwanted Encounter.' This is drawn from the idea that the demoniac, even though running to worship Jesus, at the same time feared what might come from him. Cragg's evaluation of the condition of the man is key to his interpretation. He avoids the language of 'demon possession' and seems to indicate that it is little more than the local people's 'superstitious fears' (p. 9). Most commentators on the passage acknowledge Mark's obvious belief in demon possession and deal with it one way or another, whether or not it is a part of their belief system. Cragg simply side-steps the problem by ignoring it. For Cragg the man's problem was madness brought on by circumstances leading to a 'captivity' which 'enveloped

---

even the innermost core of personality’ (p. 4). In other Bible study he has also ignored obvious issues. This is but one example of how he picks and chooses his way through a passage. Cragg’s motivation in ignoring certain aspects of the passage cannot be because of difficulties they pose. As we have seen, in his writings he tackles innumerable controversial subjects such as the divinity of Jesus, the nature of Scriptures and the prophethood of Muhammad. We argue that his approach is best explained by the fact that he has a particular theological goal which was there before he came to the study.

Drawing a modern parallel, Cragg then speculates on what might make people today undesiring of an encounter with Jesus, just as the demoniac did not want such an encounter. He offers several possibilities. One is where ‘Christianity is thought of as hereditary or traditional’ and assumes ‘a knowledge of a Christ we have never really discovered’ (emphasis original; p. 5). Dogmas and creeds are a second means for escaping an encounter. But for the majority of application, Cragg focuses on Islam as a ‘mind that fails to face Jesus Christ because beliefs and events seem to have overtaken him. His significance has been broadly superseded by other revelation’ (p. 5-6). In this Islamic mind, ‘Jesus, worn down with prophetic adversity . . . falls short of the ultimate test of total triumph exemplified in the prophet-ruler-soldier [Muhammad]’ (p. 6). The task of the Christian is ‘to rescue Jesus from his pseudo-rescuers, to save him from those who pity what they do not understand’ (pp. 6-7). To demonstrate this Islamic perspective, he quotes from
Al-Ghazali, a twelfth century Sufi mystic, who wrote a prayer which he attributed to Jesus (p. 6).34

In the above we see Lamb’s thesis of ‘retrieval’ which he argues is the paradigm which best describes Cragg’s theological stance towards Islam. But ‘The Mind of Christ’ series is still early in Cragg’s life (1972). Just as Cragg has not done this type of Bible study in his later writing, so too the theme of retrieval fades in favour of a hospitality of the gospel, particularly after his watershed work, *The Christ and the Faiths* (1986).

The second aspect of the question ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus?’ Cragg entitles ‘The Saving Presence’. Here he speculates on what sort of events or societal pressures may have brought on this madness. ‘Romans, brigands, extortioners, illusory messiahs, racial hatreds?’ (p. 7). Being caught between ‘the devil of the empire’ and ‘the deep sea of the resistors’ was ‘more than enough to make any man mad’ (p. 7). The point Cragg makes is that Jesus met the man where he was. This was made obvious through his question ‘What is your name?’ God’s meeting us where we are is an essential ingredient of salvation, according to Cragg. Cragg cross-references the woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:5-26) and the story of Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10) as further illustrative of this principle.

The third part of the study Cragg calls ‘The Steady Discipleship’. This is the second part of salvation. When the demoniac went back he was not received,

---

34 Here is an example of the first line. ‘O God, I have become so that I cannot repel what I deplore, nor make my own the good for which I hope.’
because, as Cragg put it, 'History is full of examples of the bondage that has become so customary that men do not understand how different the living power of grace could make them' (p. 9). What happened to Legion was a microcosm of the world at large.

So it was that the 'before' and 'after' of 'Legion' held up a mirror to the whole world of Decapolis. In his chronic madness, their insanities, their callous neglect, their frustrated miseries, were all writ large — aggravated, perhaps, but not fundamentally distorted. It was their world that had robbed him of his mind, their world which had almost abandoned him to despair. His, in dramatic form, was the crisis of themselves (p. 10).

Finally Cragg deals with the present day in the last section entitled 'Ourselves Today'. In it he focuses on the modern world.

'We have already noted how alike the two worlds are — that of Mark's Palestine and that of modern man. Without pressing details of which we cannot be sure, the scene in Decapolis turns on 'the healing of the mind' (p. 11).

He comes back to Islam and explains how it seeks to solve this same basic question. He speculates on the meaning of the Quranic concept of *zulm* with its various derivations (lit. 'injustice', 'violation of rights', or 'wrong doing to self, others or to God'). He has interpreted *zulm* as the usurpation of the rights of God by people engaging in idolatry, something the Qur'an vigorously opposes.

He draws parallels from this to the Christian position. Yet Cragg affirms the quality of the love of God in Christianity as a better way than the solution through power in Islam. This fits well with what we have argued is his view of the Qur'an as a kind of old testament to the New Testament.

Cragg concludes by coming back to the concept of a sound mind, cross-referencing 2 Timothy 1:7 where another derivation of *σωφρονοῦντα* in verse
15 is used. He freely interprets: 'The Greek word within that English phrase means, in paraphrase, "a mind whose thoughts intend salvation"' (p. 14). He then further explains

*Sophrosyne* is the term, but, in this New Testament usage, not just 'a mind whose thoughts are safe,' in the Greek sense of sanity through moderation, but in the Christian sense, of 'a mind whose thinking is concerned to save' (p. 14).

This is another example of a very free interpretation of a word where there is little or no objective basis for the meaning Cragg seeks to give it. The question needs to be asked, Why refer back to the Greek word at all if not to bolster his theological approach by somehow tying it into the Bible? It is not Cragg's point that we question here, but rather the way he uses Christian Scriptures to support it.

In summary, Cragg creatively draws on themes from a particular Scripture passage to make certain theological points. In doing so, however, he does not deal fully with the passage and in particular with one key issue with which all commentators struggle. That issue is Mark's obvious belief in demon possession and how/why that was passed on to the pigs. Cragg simply ignores the Gospel writer's worldview which saw the demonic in the man's insanity, his super-human strength, his recognition of Jesus (Son of the Most High God), his name (Legion) and the pigs drowning themselves in the sea. He ignores Mark's obvious belief that the man's healing was an exorcism. He ignores Mark's report that before the demoniac ever spoke, Jesus was saying 'come out of him you evil spirit.' The only reference he makes to these issues is to infer that the idea of demon possession was the superstition of the people of that time. Cragg only comments on the loss of the pigs by referring to the
village's reaction to their economic loss in this event. This was the reason for their subsequent rejection of Jesus. But Cragg does not attempt to answer the obvious questions this remarkable event raises.

Some commentators attribute the demise of the pigs to village folklore which had grown up around the event and had become part of the source material for Mark's account. Others, like Lane, who believe in the demonic, see it as a demonstration of Christ's power over Satan but at the same time a theological symbol that the time for the complete defeat of satanic forces had not yet come. Whatever the theological perspective, to deal with the passage one must struggle with the meaning of the Gospel writer's worldview and clear belief. Cragg does not and this is a problem.

The demoniac moves through the text shouting for attention even from the most casual reader but Cragg's theological attention is elsewhere. He references the passage for several theological points but fails to deal with the obvious problem which any reader cannot help but notice. By not engaging critically with the passage, Cragg misses part of its point.

8.2.3 Peter's vision and meeting with Cornelius: Acts 10

According to commentators the Acts 10 account of Peter's vision and his subsequent meeting with Cornelius is obviously there to authenticate the

---

move into ministry to the Gentiles by the Christian community. It is a vital, but still only single, event in the overall purpose of Acts. The speeches and events of the book are summarised in the words of Acts 1:8. This account is, perhaps even more than usual, best taken and understood in the entire context of the book.

Not surprisingly, this is one passage Cragg does interpret. His account of Peter’s vision is found in his book *Paul and Peter* (pp. 63-66). Cragg refers to it as ‘one of the most delightful incidents in the New Testament record’ (p. 63). The superlative language he uses to describe his joy in this account is linked to his paradigm of New Testament interpretation, that is, the hospitality of the gospel. An enormous stumbling block in the way of the universal gospel message had been overcome. ‘The contrast between Jew and Gentile was — and remains — the most stubborn of all disparities within humanity.’ (p. 66) Peter, a leading figure on one side of this chasm, is, using Cragg’s language, converted.

That Peter’s conversion to the world was decisive became clear when, returning to Jerusalem, he was accused by still unliberated colleagues of unseemly conduct in entering a Gentile house (p. 65).

Cragg’s language of conversion is not what we have mentioned previously (‘Prepositions and Salvation’ 1993, 2-3). Rather it is borrowed from another source. It has been commonly believed that the expression ‘conversion to the world’ originated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This is not so, according to Harvey Cox. ‘[It] probably originated with the famous father and son

---

Blumhardt team who mixed a form of German pietism with a passionate concern for this world.' Writing in the mid-1960s, Cox was hopeful there would soon be a 'rediscovery and renaissance of the religious socialists.'

Cragg has picked up this expression in 1980, perhaps inadvertently when he describes Peter's 'conversion to the world'. This usage of 'conversion' shows the importance he attaches to this event and also shows a theological supposition that lies behind it. The overcoming of Peter's blinding ethnicity was helped by a sovereign act of God. The unusual expression 'conversion to the world' is yet another way of expressing a major theological preoccupation with Cragg, that is, the universality of the Christian church. This is the theme of the short book *Paul and Peter* which contains this account.

*Paul and Peter* is written in layperson's language. The uncharacteristically simple style which Cragg uses is full of descriptive and imaginative renditions of events in Scripture surrounding the Jew-Gentile controversy. Apart from a very brief reference to Acts 10, Cragg does not even allude to the Acts passage when he narrates the story of Peter's vision. He uses descriptive language and poetry to build the scene for the major event which changed Peter's life. It is the freeing experience Peter had that Cragg wants his readers to know.

All Peter's unease at Gentile proximity in such impressive measure centred on the final taboo about common food. His one refuge was the dietary laws. These were the standing symbol of his Jewishness and the ultimate safeguard of identity (p. 64).

---

Cragg uses his imagination freely to understand what it must have been like for Peter. With a quote from Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* Cragg uses emotive language to demonstrate what must have been Peter's struggle. 'How shattering, even nightmarish, when the vision summoned him to "kill and eat"' (p. 64). 'On waking Peter was consumed with self-reproach at having seen and heard such a defiling temptation' (p. 64).

Cragg then recounts the event with Cornelius and notes that for Peter 'Reassuring evidence was soon to hand that the innovating Spirit had not deceived him' (p. 65). The narrative is then tied back into the whole theme of the Jew-Gentile controversy and Cragg's imaginative understanding of the meeting reported between Paul and Peter in Galatians 1:18.

Apart from his phrase 'conversion to the world', what is of significance here is not so much what is said, or even the creative, imaginative style with which it is presented, but rather what is not said. The Peter and Cornelius event is an important building block in a clear theological theme in the book of Acts. Acts 1:8 is paradigmatic for the entire book and Peter's 'conversion to the world', using Cragg's words, is an important, but still only one of several key events and speeches which build from that outline. A greater acknowledgement of the text and its context of the rest of Acts would serve further to support Cragg's argument. That approach would also act as a corrective balance to Cragg's driving theological perspective of hospitality. His preoccupation with the dangers of exclusivity could be balanced by the perspective, which is also in Acts, that God's working through a particular culture does not have to be seen
as ethnicity. Peter may have been converted to the world, but Paul also took Jewish vows (Acts 21:26).

8.2.4 2 Corinthians 1:15-20

Our final analysis relates to a brief, hastily done selection ('Grace Cup', No. 9, p. 15). Our treatment is equally brief. We have chosen the 2 Corinthians passage because Cragg links it to his overall view of what he has called, 'the sacrament of Scriptures,' even though there are other examples which might have more material for analysis.

In his study of this passage in 2 Corinthians, Cragg is as unwittingly clear as he has ever been regarding his basic approach to Christian Scriptures. 'It may be useful to include in this number of 'Grace Cup' a simple Bible Study which might serve to work out in one passage some of the general points made here' (No. 9, p. 15). This statement seems to go against his earlier affirmation in the same pamphlet where he affirms 'we must engage with the passage carefully' (p. 8). Here he comes to the text having already made his theological points and now wanting to prove them.

It is actually hard to see how the study does support all the points he has earlier made. It was obviously hastily written and not edited to the standard he usually applies to his work. Nevertheless he does link the study with one major issue, that is, that the sacrament of Scriptures is not just for the text but for its proclamation and practice as well. Cragg's point in the simple Bible
study, which he affirms Paul makes, is linked to the nature of ministry and how Scripture fits in to that.

By ‘sacrament’ we mean an encounter in which that which is physical, actual and present becomes a point where we experience meaning — the meaning the ‘point’ in time and place embodies (p. 2).\(^{40}\)

Paul does not retaliate to accusations about his unfaithfulness in not coming. Rather, according to Cragg, he turns the tables and ‘skilfully links his own rehabilitation with the faithfulness of God’ (p. 15). Cragg sees this as ‘Tact and truth at their best!’ (p. 15). The point is that the sacrament of the Word is not just the study of it but also the application in a way that draws together rather than divides. Cragg’s large pastoral heart is clearly visible in this Bible study which is used to illustrate his overall approach to Christian Scriptures. Revelation is better implemented than argued. Thus even this brief, hastily drawn up Bible study demonstrates a central concern for Cragg.

8.3 Conclusion

Cragg has an implicit rather than explicit methodology for interpreting Christian Scriptures. It is one which brings a theological agenda to the text and allows for imaginative, new insights. Characteristics of his methodology are a traditional, homiletical style which utilises imagination, poetry and some distinctive interpretations based on the original languages. These are not, however, interpretative principles and they cannot be substituted for them.

The difficulty with his methodology is that poetry and imagination often act as

---

\(^{40}\) We earlier noted as an example of his homiletical style, that Cragg has used the traditional definition of sacrament in a non-traditional way.
substitutes for critical analysis. Even an implicit methodology needs developed interpretative principles.

As for his actual exegesis, we have argued that Cragg’s approach to Bible study is to bring a theological perspective which he uses Christian Scriptures to prove. It is a subject, not a text which he studies. If we consider the above four examples of exegesis, this argument is borne out. The theme of the hospitality of the gospel is seen in the suffering, waiting father. A God active in the atonement is not so evident.

If one accepts the text as Cragg does, the account from Mark of Jesus casting demons out of the demoniac begs to be interpreted as the confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The demons are cast temporarily into the sea through the pigs, indicating that the time for their final destruction had not yet come. Cragg simply ignores the obvious problems of demon possession in first the man and then the pigs. His not seeing a confrontation between kingdoms as a way of explaining this event is consistent with his theological position. Cragg writes little on the Kingdom of heaven, a theme strong in the Synoptic Gospels. It has an air of exclusivity about it, much as the concept of ‘State’ does in Islam. Thus the passage in Mark is left with an incomplete interpretation when Cragg focuses on the mind of the demoniac for his series ‘The Mind of Christ’.

Peter’s ‘conversion to the world’ is well in keeping with Cragg’s view of the hospitality of the gospel. Cragg chooses the incident but misses the greater
context of Acts which would both support and act as a corrective to his emphases. Finally in his hasty Bible study on 2 Corinthians 1:15-20 his concept of revelation is evident. Revelation is not so much propositional as it is experienced. It cannot be known until it is experienced.

Thus we conclude that while Cragg does offer some exegesis, his references and quotations do not survive an exegetical examination. Examples of his exegesis demonstrate some individual interpretations which are used to make theological or devotional points. His utilisation of texts is quite selective but consistent in his overall framework of understanding revelation. Even though he may not have given much thought to interpretative principles, the way he does his interpretation is quite in keeping with what we have seen of his theology of Christian Scriptures in Chapters 4-7.

Does this matter? What difference does it make how Cragg interprets Christian Scriptures? Throughout Christian history, beginning with New Testament writers and Church Fathers, people have cited Scriptures to bolster their arguments, and in doing so have either ignored or missed the author's meaning. Why then should Cragg be faulted for a similar approach to interpretation? There are two reasons. The first we have alluded to above (see 8.1.2). By quoting Scriptures Cragg gives weight or authority to his ideas. But on examination often it is discovered that, whatever merit his ideas may have, the meaning of the text does not support them. By quoting the Bible Cragg gives the appearance of adding weight to his arguments, but it is not true weight.
The second reason Cragg's exegesis is a problem relates to the issue of common ground. One reason that the definition of exegesis given at the beginning of this chapter includes the author's meaning is that this must be involved for there to be common ground for discussion. Regardless of what has happened in history or happens in the church today, if there is no commitment to understanding the author's meaning on the part of those who do exegesis, there is no common ground for debate. This is not to say that one cannot come to the text with theological or social questions or that interpretation of the text cannot move in a number of directions. It does say, however, that without a commitment to engaging with the author's meaning in his exegesis, Cragg's ideas are his ideas — nothing more. It not possible to engage with him on the grounds for those ideas, as his basis is idiosyncratic or personal. This is not to say that he is wrong or that his instincts or personal faith do not lead him rightly. It is to say that meaningful debate over his ideas has been truncated through his handling of Christian Scriptures.
9. Conclusion

In a shrinking world where people of very different faiths and beliefs are increasingly becoming close neighbours, Kenneth Cragg has taken on the exacting task of finding common ground where two such neighbours, Christians and Muslims, can meet. The horizons within which his theology developed were set early on in his career by two boundaries: his evangelical Christian upbringing, which gave him a deep personal faith, and an education based on Enlightenment values which in turn motivated him to seek that common ground. We have classified Cragg as a modernist largely because of this strong motivation. It is modernism which strives for the universal. On the other hand, the unique blend which Cragg brings to his task is a profound Christian loyalty ('fidelity') coupled to a meticulous examination and reinterpretation of the Christian and Muslim faiths. Cragg is a modernist who is a Christian. Thus though a giant in his particular academic area during the second half of the twentieth century, like anyone else, he is a child of his times.

Cragg's writings have been widely received. Those who study Islam and Christianity from the religious viewpoint of inter-faith concerns cannot ignore him. We have seen (Ch. 1) how a surprising number of those who approach Islam from the perspectives of other disciplines such as orientalism, history, sociology or anthropology see value in taking Cragg's understanding into account.
In this thesis we have particularly highlighted evangelicals as one group for whom Christian Scriptures are important and who have utilised Cragg’s work. It is not an uncommon phenomenon that creative thinkers receive their inspiration from the ‘left’. But it cannot be too far left because there must be enough shared common ground for arguments to be read and heard. Jane Smith places Cragg in the centre of a continuum of theologians who deal with issues of pluralism, primarily touching on Islam. To Cragg’s right she places Samuel Zwemer and Phil Parshall as representative of evangelicals, while to his left, John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith.¹ There is no doubt that evangelicals of Protestant Christianity have utilised Cragg’s creative approach to Islam, often in pursuit of their goal for contextualisation. Fuad Accad is a good example of one who uses the Qur’an as a bridge to the cross. While Accad’s evangelistic motivation would seem inappropriate or even crass to Cragg, Cragg’s own contextualising to find the Christian Gospel in the Qur’an has made such a comparison possible.

Cragg has been assessed both by Muslims and non-Muslims for either fairly representing or unfairly misrepresenting Islam. But only rarely has he been critiqued by Christians for his representation or misrepresentation of Christianity. (Rudvin and Lamb would be partial exceptions.) His Christian position has been assumed while his interpretation of Islam has been evaluated.

We have noted Cragg’s search for common ground on numerous occasions throughout this thesis. If it is a major feature of his writings which others have also noted,\(^2\) then his approach to Christianity becomes vitally important. Nowhere is this better seen than in the issue of Islam’s and Christianity’s respective Scriptures. Cragg has written extensively about the Qur’an but has not had the same intentionality in his writing about Christian Scriptures. Yet he has used Christian Scriptures extensively in his writings and has written about them.

Lamb has classified Cragg’s approach to Islam as ‘biblically-grounded’.\(^3\) We are not sure why. Is it because of the amount of Christian Scriptures Cragg quotes? If so Cragg is biblical because he often references Christian Scriptures. He also offers some exegesis but, as we have noted, his theological points are not always well-served by the exegesis he offers. Cragg’s ‘Bible study’ is of a subject, not a text. His methodology is to bring his theology to the text which in turn is used to validate his points. In examining Cragg’s theology of Christian Scriptures and how he uses them we have discovered some surprisingly individual theological perspectives and inconsistencies such as his definition of revelation, his acceptance of the canon but his rejection of parts of the Old Testament and his ignoring of parts of the New, and his unusual understanding of the analogy of hospitality.

\(^2\) Jane Smith marks ‘his quest for commonalities’ as an identifying feature of Cragg’s writing, \textit{ibid.}, 74.

\(^3\) Lamb, \textit{Call to Retrieval}, 172.
Lamb asserts that Cragg’s theology was developed early in his life and that he has been remarkably consistent to this perspective over the years — changing very little. That seems to be a mistake. If we take Lamb as meaning what a psychologist might say — that all major traits are developed in individuals before school age while everything else is an outworking of that — we could argue for his point. Cragg’s theology can be traced back to his upbringing and liberalising education. In that sense, however, no-one changes. In the usual understanding, Cragg has changed. He himself claims to have changed. While there may be no ‘conversion’ or about-face demonstrated in his writings, there has been significant development in aspects of his theology which we have been studying. Lamb has read and interpreted Cragg’s later writing in the light of his earlier works. There is a progression in Cragg’s theology, but not a consistency. Noting the changes in this progression has been helpful in understanding how Cragg’s engagement with Islam may have influenced his own understanding of Christian Scriptures.

Cragg deals with a number of scriptural issues in his writing on the Qur’ân. Some of these have come to be reflected in his treatment of Christian Scriptures. The majesty, the transcendence and the poetic language of the Qur’ân, Cragg has at times wished onto Christian Scriptures. His changing perspective on how he has come to view translation is one indication of that. His use of poetry and imagery, sometimes in place of reason, is another. Thus, how the Qur’ân is to be possessed by a non-Muslim is a subject of ongoing

*For instance, The Call to Retrieval, which is the 1997 publication of Lamb’s thesis has added no analysis and very few references to Cragg’s writing which post-dated the thesis (1987). This is one indication Lamb still seems to be viewing Cragg’s work through the spectacles of his early writing.*
interest for Cragg. He has come to treat the Qur’an as an old testament to the New Testament, with points of continuity and discontinuity, just as the Old Testament in the Bible has points of continuity and discontinuity with the New. In the process of possessing the Qur’an as a non-Muslim, Cragg actually engages in a contextualisation of the Gospel by picking out aspects of the Qur’an which can be points of continuity with the Christian faith. In order to do this Cragg has to go against much of traditional Quranic interpretation, ignoring hadith and tafsir and thus his ‘sola Qur’an’ approach to the Qur’an.

Cragg’s ‘Sola Qur’an’ does not translate into Martin Luther’s ‘Sola Scriptura’ for Christian Scriptures. Instead Cragg has developed a canon-within-the-canon approach where Christian Scriptures are filtered through a single model of revelation, for which Cragg has his own definition. Instead of considering new ways of looking at the Bible as Scripture, Cragg has accepted quite a traditional understanding as the Christian understanding of the nature of its Scriptures. This not only includes its formation and subsequent ownership by the church in canon, but also interpretative principles. Cragg gets stuck, for instance, in only one way of understanding most of the Old Testament. He chafes at it, struggles with it, but out of loyalty to his Christian faith, accepts the decision. He does not argue for an open canon. His honesty, however, does not allow him to gloss over the problems this presents and in practice parts of Scripture are either overtly rejected or are sub-consciously ignored. Cragg is more critical of the Old Testament than he is of the Qur’an. Much of the Old Testament Cragg feels needs to be corrected by the New. Though acknowledging it as part of the biblical canon which the church has accepted,
he does not accept it as Scripture in the way that he does the New. It has become an old testament, similar to other old testaments to be found in other parts of the world.

In the New Testament Cragg's definition of revelation becomes the touchstone through which its various books are seen. His discovery of the principles of vicarious suffering in Islam has influenced his view of the cross in Christianity. He emphasises the suffering prophethood of Christ but largely ignores the intermediary and glorification roles of priest and king, which are also strongly part of Protestant theology. Lamb's assertion that Cragg's approach to Islam and theological questions is largely Anglican is stretched when it comes to comparing Cragg's understanding of the atonement as vicarious suffering versus the 'sacrifice for sins' put forward in Anglican liturgy.

But nowhere is Cragg's search for common ground more clearly seen than in his analogy of 'hospitality'. Cragg finds it in the New Testament at least partially through imaginative exegesis of words. Hospitality has done much to frame his theology and even affects his model of revelation and contributes to his canon-within-the-canon approach to Scriptures. What is revelation is that which conveys hospitality. Thus, for instance, key parables of Jesus which convey exclusivity through the rejection of certain people are missed by Cragg. His understanding of hospitality has only strengthened his already strong views of ethnicity and the exclusiveness which can arise out of that. He has
not given due attention to what Sanneh has called the ‘instrumental’ nature of culture as it relates to revelation.

Cragg’s engagement with Islam and its Qur’ān has served the function of broadening his view of Christian Scriptures at times, then almost paradoxically at other times of narrowing his understanding. For instance in the exegesis he offers of the parable of the Prodigal Son, Cragg comes up with several innovative interpretations, not least of which is to see the cross in the parable. This came directly out of a Muslim challenge. But in seeking to find common ground with Islam, Cragg’s understanding of that cross is truncated. The suffering prophet is there but not the crucifixion and with it the priestly role of Christ. The other related parables of Luke 15 which might have helped Cragg in his interpretation by offering a corrective are ignored. He saw the cross (suffering) because of his engagement with Islam, but did not see the crucifixion (atonement), also because of that engagement. Bailey, on the other hand, who borrows the thought, sees the crucifixion and atonement through the action of the father. The difference was that he was not trying to engage with Islam as Cragg was. Another example we noted was Cragg’s openness to the Qur’ān as Scripture but at the same time a developing tendency towards a more restrictive understanding of Christian Scriptures, as illustrated in his reticence expressed towards common language translations in Arabic.

Having noted some of the problems, Cragg’s approach to theology in cross-reference has led to significant developments for Christians who seek to engage with Islam. His understanding of different scriptural issues between
Conclusion

the Bible and the Qur'an led Cragg early on to see easily the comparison as one of revelation to revelation and thus Christ to the Qur'an. Although this paralleled a similar trend in Christian Protestant theology where Barth had moved to the position of understanding revelation as primarily being housed in Christ, Cragg was ahead of many for his time. His engagement with Islam was partially responsible for bringing this aspect of revelation into focus.

Cragg's compassionate understanding of Islam also mirrored changes not just in Christian theology but also in what was happening in the whole area of Christian-Muslim relations. Thus as Cragg began to write, he was well received because he was a forerunner of an approach whose time had come. One important aspect which has been picked up by others is the one mentioned above, that is, comparing revelation to revelation, or Christ to the Qur'an. This approach of emphasising the comparison of revelations rather than scriptures has its strengths and weaknesses. It enables Christian-Muslim engagement to move one step back from a traditional quarrel through a better understanding of the very different functions Scriptures serve in Christianity and Islam. On the other hand we must conclude on the evidence given that Cragg has given short shrift to a theological understanding of Christian Scriptures by moving theological attention away from them. He offered 'Bible study' or exegesis before he developed his theology of Christian Scriptures in writing. It is possible that his painful background on the subject delayed his dealing with it until he could see it in a more mature perspective. Whatever the reason, our analysis has left us with the idea that Cragg's theology of
Christian Scriptures has not been as adequately developed as it might have been to serve as an effective tool for his theology in cross-reference.

We have argued that some of the difficulties that Cragg has with the Bible as Scripture could be helped within the framework of his theology if he were to consider new and different models for understanding Scriptures. His approach has been to take the single model of how Scripture serves revelation and interpret it as the Christian view of Scripture. The result for Cragg is that parts of Christian Scriptures are valued only for their contribution to this revelation. Amongst some evangelicals (if we, for a moment, can classify Cragg in the way some others have), there have been some innovations in biblical understanding as characterised by Goldingay’s *Models for Scripture*, which if broadly accepted would lead to a paradigm shift. The crisis in Cragg’s view of Christian Scriptures is not new. There are evangelicals who have been acknowledging it for some time. Cragg has been just a bit more honest about it than some. Goldingay offers the alternative of considering Christian Scriptures through the lenses of different models, no single one of which is sufficient in and of itself. The models are not dogma but ways of perceiving different truths, truths that are hard to explain in every-day parlance.

Considering Christian Scriptures from the point of view of different models we argue is a viable alternative to Cragg’s canon-within-the-canon approach, which essentially rejects parts of Christian Scriptures on the basis of his own personal definitions and categories.
Thomas Kuhn in setting out his sociological theory about how scientific revolutions come about, concludes that it often takes a new generation of scientists to become aware of an anomaly in the empirical evidence for a theory in such a way that they are prepared to propose and test a new theory. The existing generation often simply cannot see the ‘cracks’ in a way which leads them to understand that their theory is faulty. The question needs to be asked that given new approaches to biblical understanding amongst evangelicals, will it take another generation in dialogue with Islam to look at Christian Scriptures in a different light, taking into account some of the unanswered anomalies Cragg’s approach has produced? Cragg’s Christian upbringing gives him a Christology and respect for revelation. His education stimulated him towards seeking a common ground with Islam and yielded the analogy of hospitality. The result has much to offer but there are cracks in it because Cragg has not adequately developed his theology of Christian Scriptures.

Cragg is a giant in his time but times are changing. Perhaps another effort at theology in cross-reference to Islam will emerge which incorporates a new framework, one that includes a different understanding of Christian Scriptures by seeing them through different models. It too will have strengths and weaknesses but can build on the enormous body of material Cragg and others like him have developed.

---

10. Select General Bibliography


Badr, Habib. 'Mission to “Nominal” Christians: The Policy and Practice of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and its


_________. *Parables of the Kingdom.* London: Nisbet, 1935.


Foy, W. 'Review of This Year in Jerusalem.' *Expository Times* 94 (1982), 30.


Hanson, Anthony. 'Review of Christianity in World Perspective.' *Churchman.* 83 (1969), 125-6.


________. ‘Review of Sandals At the Mosque.’ *Frontier* 3 (1960), 127-132.


McDonald, Hugh Dermot. *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About the Bible*. Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1979.


Nida, Eugene A. ‘Review of Sandals At the Mosque.’ Practical Anthropology 8 (1961), 139.


_________. ‘Review of Counsels in Contemporary Islam.’ *International


_________. ‘Islam at Mid-Century.’ The Muslim World, 42 (1952), 313-332.


_______. 'The Use of Philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics.' *Churchman* 87 (1973), 87-100.


Tibawi, A. L. 'Review of *The Dome and the Rock.*' *Islamic Quarterly* 12 (1968), 120.


__________. 'Review of *Islam and the Muslim.*' *Islamic Culture* 54 (1980), 243-244.


__________. 'Introducing Bishop Kenneth Cragg.' *Salaam* 6 (1985), 34-44.


Warren, Max. 'Review of *The Call of the Minaret.*' *CMS Newsletter* 192 (March 1957).


Wright, David F. 'Soundings in the Doctrine of Scripture in British Evangelicalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century.' Tyndale Bulletin 31 (1980), 87-106.


Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. 'Review of The Pen and the Faith.' Islamic Quarterly 30 (1986), 201-207.


__________. Heirs of the Prophets. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1946.


11. Bibliography of Kenneth Cragg


*Palestine: the Prize and Price of Zion.* To be published by Cassell, September, 1997.


‘Holding Faith and Conceding Pluralism [Reply to Cardinal J. Tomko, “Missionary Challenges to the Theology of Salvation”].’ *Christian*

1989


'Review of Kail C. Ellis, ed. The Vatican, Islam, and the Middle East.' The Muslim World 79 (1989), 249.


1988

'Islamic Teaching and the Muslim Teachers.' Studia Missionalia 37 (1988), 77-102.


1987

1986

'The Church and Other Faiths.' Interfaith News 10 (February 1986), 5.

'Faith in Faith?' Church News (March 1986), 1-3.


'The iron in the Soul: in Memoriam: Dr. Fa'iz Sayigh.' The Muslim World 76 (1986), 67-79.


1985


The Church and Other Faiths.' Interfaith News 9 (October 1985), 1.


'The Potters and the King.' Church News (May 1985), 1-3.


1984


'Privy Counsel.' Church News (July 1984), 1-11.


1983

'Blake in Jerusalem at Easter.' Church News (April 1983), 9-10.

'By the fig and the olive: perspective round Jerusalem.' American-Arab Affairs 4 (1983), 135-145.


'Man on the Loose.' Vidyajyoti 47 (1983), 126-134.


1982

'Bread and Wine.' Church News (April 1982), 4-5.

'God and Man.' *Encounter* 82 (February, 1982), 3-16.


1981


'The Ayatollah and the Archbishop.' *Church News* (September 1981), 5-6.


'In 3 (W)hole.' *Church News* (March 1981), 1-3.


1980


‘Buddhism and Baptism.’ Theology 82 (1979), 259-265.


‘Legacies and Hopes in Muslim/Christian Theology.’ Islamochristiana 3 (1977), 1-10. [reprinted in Encounter 4 (1978), 1 10].


‘The Qurʾān and the Christian Reader.’ The Muslim World 46 (1956), 61-68.


1972 'The Contemporary Near East as a School of Theology.' The N.E.S.T. Theological Review (July-October, 1972), 5-14.


'This Cruciform World. A Study in Christian Universality.' Union Seminary Quarterly Review 21 (1966), 103-115.


'The Encounter of Christianity and Islam.' The Student World 54 (1964), 126-136.


'Islam and the Political Order.' Frontier 3 (1960), 194-200.

'Jesus in Contemporary Islam.' The Listeners 63 (1960), 347-349
1959


1958


1957


'Power and Suffering in the Arab World.' *East and West Review* 23 (1957), 3-11.


‘Thoughts, Words, Pens, Deeds.’ The N.E.S.T. Theological Review 6 (1957), 7-12.


‘“City of Wrong.” A Muslim Studies the Cross.’ The Muslim World 46 (1956), 132-143, 224-236.


‘Religious Developments of Islam in the Twentieth Century (with special reference to the pressures of the modern, secular world).’ Journal of World History 3 (1956), 504-524.

1955 ‘“Each Other’s Face”: Some Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Colloquy Today.’ The Muslim World 45 (1955), 172-182.


‘Persons, Situations and Books: Christian Literature for the Contemporary Muslim.’ The Muslim World 43 (1953), 197-207.
"The Somehow may be This-how." A plea for constructive Muslim-Christian theological relations today. 'The Muslim World 43 (1953), 118-129.