

Going Soft On Islam? Reflections on Some Evangelical Responses to Islam

The Laing Lecture for 1988

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INTRODUCTION

Among the many visiting speakers who preached in the mid-week service during my days at the old London Bible College in Marylebone Road was a missionary who at that time was working in North Africa. I don't remember his name, but I *do* remember his message, because it made a profound impact on me.

His text was John 8 and he spoke about the challenge of Muslim evangelism. The main thrust of his message was that we cannot begin to have an effective ministry with Muslims until and unless we appreciate what we are dealing with in Islam. Just as Jesus was prepared to say to the Jewish leaders 'You are of your father the Devil' (John 8:44), so we today must recognize that Islam is a religion inspired by the Devil, and therefore must think of our ministry among Muslims in terms of a confrontation with him.

I never forgot that address, and it continued to challenge me during my years in Egypt. I had gone out with great hopes of being able to reach Muslims, but soon found myself caught in a Christian ghetto, and therefore found it hard to make contact with Muslims. During the two years that followed on the Staff of Crowther Hall at the Selly Oak Colleges, I was able to go deeper into the study of Islam. But it wasn't until I was engaged in student work based in Beirut that I had greater freedom to talk to Muslims, and was able to face up more seriously to the challenge of Islam.

What I want to do is to share with you something of my own pilgrimage as an evangelical Christian trying to come to terms with this great world religion. I propose first of all to outline some of the different emphases in evangelical responses to Islam in recent years. I then want to pinpoint what I see as the crucial questions which we have to face together. Finally, I shall suggest some of the implications of all this for theological education.

APPRECIATING THE DIVERSITY OF EVANGELICAL RESPONSES

The examples I have chosen are not intended to cover the whole range

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of evangelical opinion; nor do they represent completely distinct schools of thought. Several of them can be seen simply as different emphases, and we may want to identify ourselves with more than one approach. Because of the danger of presenting caricatures of different positions and putting them neatly into fixed categories (which is, I believe, one of the major weaknesses of the 1986 BMU Report *Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue*), I have given these

approaches titles that are as uncontroversial as possible, and with the minimum of comment I want to allow exponents of these approaches to describe them in their own words.

A traditional evangelical response: 'No compromise with Islam'

You will notice that I have used the indefinite article 'A', since I'm not sure we can insist that there has been only one evangelical position. I am also resisting the temptation to give it a label beyond the adjective 'traditional'! My quotation to illustrate this position comes from a section entitled 'Variety Among Christians' in the introductory guide of the recent *Carey College Study Course*:

In this time of great opportunity and great expectations there are emerging a number of different stances, even among evangelical Christians, in regard to Christian/Muslim relations.

Some enter dialogue to find common ground between Christianity and Islam, others would call this compromise. Some deny that Satan has a role in Islam, others would see a fierce spiritual battle. You will inevitably have to face up to questions such as 'Is the Allah of Islam the same as the God of Christianity?' 'Is Islam a possible way to God?' You may be tempted to think that Islam makes people 'good' even in comparison with many Christians and be led to ask why God should allow these good people to go to Hell.

Carey College believes that there is only one way to God the Father and that is through His one and only Son Jesus Christ. This way is made absolutely clear in the Bible and all people regardless of race or country of origin need to accept the Good News and be born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. Without the Lord Jesus they are lost.

We must face up to the tensions and deep questions that will come to our minds in this study course. We recommend that you bring them into the light in your study groups and hence defeat, through prayer, the powers of darkness that would seek to lead you to compromise and disunity.¹

Although the writers of the course acknowledge the diversity of views among evangelicals, it is reasonably clear on which side of the fence they

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themselves want to come down. But part of the value of this summary for our purpose is that it alerts us to three of the key issues we need to take up later: the question of the identity of the God of Islam, the role of Satan in Islam, and the question of the salvation of those who have rejected or never heard the gospel.

The new threshold: 'We need a new theology of religions'

The title here comes from the booklet *A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim communities*, published in 1976. The author was David Brown, a distinguished Islamicist, former CMS missionary, and Bishop of Guildford from 1973 until his death in 1982. He worked closely with an advisory group set up by the British Council of Churches and the Conference of British Missionary Societies, which included such well-

¹ Carey College, *Introductory Guide to Carey College Study Topics* (Carey College, Whitefield House, London 1987) 10.

known names as Professor Sir Norman Anderson and the late Rev Canon Dick Wootton; but, according to the preface, the document was David Brown's work and appeared 'on his authority'. The following section has the title *A new threshold: the modern Antioch*:

The disciples of Jesus of Nazareth have crossed many high thresholds of new understanding since they were first called Christians in Gentile Antioch. Each new threshold crossed has resulted in a clearer awareness of the significance of Jesus Christ, and an enrichment of theology as well as producing tensions and misunderstandings...

One of the new thresholds which the Church in Britain is called to cross is that which leads to an understanding of other faiths in relation to the purposes of God. In earlier times, most Christians had no occasion to cross this threshold because societies were largely homogeneous, and one major religion was usually dominant in any particular region. For most Christians these conditions still operate. But in today's pluralist world, adherents of different religions share together in common enterprises and as fellowcitizens of the nations and cities in which they live...

Understanding other faiths in relation to the purposes of God involves a willingness to believe that many of those who practise other faiths have a living relationship with God and know the power of his grace in their lives. It implies also a willingness to accept that they worship God as he has been made known to them, in spirit and in truth; and to recognize that they enjoy in their own religious pilgrimages experiences which are similar to what Christians call trust and hope, devotion and sincerity, repentance from sin and turning to God. It means also to affirm that the God whom they worship is he whom Christians know as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, even though their understanding of his

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relationship with the created universe differs from that of Christians. To affirm such statements as these, gladly and with sincerity, is for many Christians to step across a very high threshold indeed. Many do it uncertainly because they fear to devalue their commitment to the lordship of Christ.

Crossing this threshold, however, need not be a destructive process; instead, it can be a purifying and enriching experience.²

Whether or not we are prepared to go the whole way with David Brown, these words remind us that, as Christians living in Britain, we need to take into account the new situation created by the spread of Islam in the west, and be fully aware of all the political, sociological and theological implications of the pluralist society to which we belong.

The Call of the Minaret: 'Let's appreciate Islam at its best'

Since Kenneth Cragg's roots are so firmly within the evangelical tradition, I personally have no hesitation in describing his approach as genuinely evangelical. He trained at Tyndale Hall in Bristol, and his brother Herbert, who died in 1980, was a well-known Keswick speaker.

The passage I have chosen to give the flavour of his approach comes from his first book *The Call of the Minaret*, first published in 1956, and revised and republished in 1986. The main

² David Brown, *A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their Relations with Muslim Communities* (London 1976) 22-23.

message of the book is that we need to be willing to listen to the call to prayer and the confession of faith that come from the minaret before we begin our own proclamation, and that we have an obligation to try to appreciate and enter into Islam at its very best.

After a description of contemporary Islam (Part I. Islam at the New Century), he devotes several chapters to an attempt to explain Islam from within, and in its own terms (Part II. Minaret and Muslim). The third part of the book, entitled, *Minaret and Christian*, invites the Christian to hear the call of the minaret as a call to Meeting, to Understanding, to Participation, to Retrieval, to Interpretation and finally to Hope and Faith. The idea of retrieval is explained in the following way:

Among the factors contributing to the rise of Islam was the Christian failure of the Church. It was a failure in love, in purity, and in fervour, a failure of the spirit. Truth, as often before and after, was involved to its hurt in the spiritual fault of its trustees. Islam developed in an environment of imperfect Christianity and later by its own inner force gathered such strength to become, and remain, essentially at odds with the pure faith beyond the imperfection.

This is the inward tragedy, from the Christian angle, of the rise of Islam, the genesis and dissemination of a new belief that

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claimed to displace what it had never effectively known. The state of being a stranger to the Christ of Christians has been intensified by further failures of love and loyalty on the part of institutional Christianity in the long and often bitter external relations of the two faiths through the centuries.

It is for these reasons that the call of the minaret must always seem to Christians a call to retrieval. They yearn to undo the alienation and to make amends for the past by as full a restitution as they can achieve of the Christ to whom Islam is a stranger. The Objective is not, as the Crusaders believed, the repossession of what Christendom has lost, but the restoration to Muslims of the Christ whom they have missed. All that the minaret both says and fails to say is included in this call to retrieval as the listening Christian hears it.³

Cragg is not content, however, simply to listen to Muslims or to engage in dialogue for the purpose of understanding them. In many of his books he presents a sharp challenge to Islam in three main areas: its understanding of revelation and inspiration; its philosophy of power based on the example of the Prophet and the conviction that Islam must rule; and its over-optimistic response to evil. Even if his writings aren't always easy to understand, there's no escaping his missionary vision and his desire to bear witness to 'the Christ to whom Islam is a stranger'.

Folk Islam and power encounter: 'Let's recognize Islam as it is'

Whereas Cragg and others have pleaded that we appreciate Islam at its very best, many missionaries believe that there is a real danger in concentrating on Ideal Islam, High Islam, Islam as it ought to be. Their experience of missionary work tells them that the description of Islam in text books doesn't always correspond with Islam on the ground.

³ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (London 1985) 219-220.

Samuel Zwemer was one of the first writers in this century to draw attention to the importance of Folk Islam in three of his books: *Islam and Animism* (1917), *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions* (1920), and *Studies in Popular Islam* (1939). He explains the importance of this emphasis in the following words:

The student of Islam will never understand the common people unless he knows the reasons for their curious beliefs and practices... all of which still blind and oppress mind and heart with constant fear of the unseen... Witchcraft, sorcery, spells, and charms are the background of the native Muslim psychology to an extent that is realised only by those who have penetrated most deeply into the life of the people.⁴

At the Colorado Springs Conference in 1978 Bill Musk presented a paper entitled *Popular Islam: the Hunger of the Heart*.

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Christ, in his dealings with ordinary people around him, tended to free them from the 'ideal' religion of the professionals. Why educate the ordinary Muslims in their own faith so that Christ can meet them there tomorrow when he can meet them more fundamentally at the point of their felt-needs today?⁵

At the same conference Arthur F Glasser contributed a paper entitled *Power Encounter in Conversion from Islam*.⁶ This same theme was taken up by Paul Hiebert in a masterly paper contributed to the Lausanne Muslim Track Conference in Holland in 1987 on *Power Encounter and the Challenge of Folk Islam*.⁷ One of the reasons why his contribution to this debate is so significant is that he writes not only as a missionary with field experience in India, but also as a trained anthropologist. His experience overseas and his involvement in the debate about the Signs and Wonders Movement at Fuller lead him to warn that 'we must guard lest our answer (to Folk Islam) be a distorted version of Christianity'. He points out the following dangers associated with certain unthinking Christian responses to Folk Islam:

- 1 The danger of confusing phenomenology and ontology.
- 2 The danger of self-centred-narcissism.
- 3 The danger of a new Christian magic based on a false theology of power.
- 4 The danger of instituting a new secularism by perpetuating a dualistic world view.
- 5 The danger of making signs and wonders normative and ends in themselves.
- 6 The danger of generating a false sense of guilt and failure among those who are not healed or delivered.

⁴ Samuel Zwemer, *Studies in Popular Islam*, quoted by Bill Musk 'Popular Islam: The Hunger of the Heart' in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, ed Don McCurry (London 1979) 209.

⁵ Bill Musk, op cit, 214.

⁶ Arthur F Glasser, 'Power Encounter in Conversion from Islam' in *The Gospel and Islam*, ed Don McCurry, 129ff.

⁷ Paul Hiebert, *Power Encounter and the Challenge of Folk Islam*, paper submitted to the Zeist Conference, July 1987 (MARC USA 1988).

7 The danger of exalting a human leader.

8 The danger of selling out to pragmatism.

For those who wonder how this awareness of Folk Islam and Power Encounter works out in practice in an Islamic context, Vivienne Stacey provides an extremely helpful and balanced treatment in her booklet *Christ Supreme over Satan: Spiritual Warfare, Folk Religion and the Occult*.⁸ She doesn't make the reductionist mistake of saying that everything in our approach to Muslims must be thought of in terms of a power encounter, but explains in detail how she and others have dealt with manifestations of evil in particular situations.

Gospel and culture: 'Let's reduce every unnecessary hindrance'

This emphasis is one that we have come to associate with the Church Growth Movement, and in particular with the School of World Mission at Fuller in Pasadena. The person who has worked it out in greatest

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detail in the Muslim world is Phil Parshall, who worked for over 20 years in a village situation in Bangladesh, and is now based in Manila.

In his most recent book *Beyond the Mosque: Christians Within Muslim Community* he set out his agenda as follows:

Introductory books on Islam continue to flow forth from Christian presses. I find this to be a bit distressing. It seems to me that we should leave the rudiments of Islam and press on to examine the weightier matters of Muslim life: theology, ethics, sociology, and ethnic distinctives. Our efforts should be directed towards exploring the potential to bridge differences between Islam and Christianity.⁹

He sums up his main message in these terms:

My major thesis is that extraction evangelism is an erroneous methodology and should immediately cease. We must see the light and salt of Christianity expressed through converts' lives within their own sociological milieu of relatives, friends, and acquaintances.¹⁰

When he asks 'Is there ever a converging set of circumstances that will allow converts to remain members in good standing within Islamic community?' his answer is a very positive 'Yes'.

Sociology and theology are inseparable components of Islam. Therefore, it is a serious mistake to approach the religion of 850 million Muslims from only a theological perspective. On the other hand, some Christian authors, in my view, have gone too far in proclaiming the obstacles encountered in Muslim evangelism to be primarily sociological. They seem to contend that, given an ideal set of societal circumstances, Muslims will

⁸ Vivienne Stacey, *Christ Supreme over Satan: Spiritual Warfare, Folk Religion and the Occult* (Masihi Isha'at Khana, 36 Ferozput Rd, Lahore-16, Pakistan).

⁹ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque, Christians within Muslim Community* (Grand Rapids 1985).

¹⁰ Phil Parshall, op cit, 21.

convert to Christ in large numbers. This simply is not true. The offense of the cross and the divinity of Christ remain as major stumbling blocks to the Muslim. We should, however, be committed to reducing every unnecessary hindrance, both sociological and theological, to the Muslim becoming a follower of Christ. My postulate is that we can do a much better job of evangelism among the Sons of Ishmael than we have in the past.¹¹

Whether or not we are prepared to go the whole way with all the details of how Parshall has practised contextualization in Bangladesh, his writing and his work have forced us to face the question of what a contextualized gospel and a contextualized convert church in any Muslim context would look like.

If these, then, are some of the main responses to Islam among evangelical Christians, where do we differ among ourselves? What are

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the areas of disagreement? We now turn, therefore, to attempt to analyse the crucial questions to which we give different answers.

PIN-POINTING THE BASIC ISSUES

Is the God of Islam the same as the God of Christianity?

Let me grasp the nettle and outline how I personally go about answering this question:

1 The question itself is a kind of trick question, because it forces us to answer with a simple 'Yes' or 'No'. What we need to do, therefore, is to break the question down into several smaller questions:

- eg a Is the Christian's *idea of God* the same as the Muslim's idea of God? I trust that we would all answer 'No!'
- b Is there anything in common between the Christian's idea of God and the Muslim's idea of God? Again I trust that we wouldn't hesitate to answer 'Yes'.
- C Is there enough in common between the Christian's idea of God and the Muslim's idea of God for us to be able to use the same word? This, I would suggest, is the crucial question. Some Christians, like Bishop Rudven of Karachi, believe that there is not enough in common, while others, like Kenneth Cragg, believe that there is enough in common. In the words of Michael Nazir-Ali, 'For Cragg the similarity outweighs the disparity, whereas for Rudven the disparity clearly outweighs the similarity.'¹²

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there's a country somewhere in the world where the sun is never clearly visible. People are aware of the sun, because they can see the shape of the sun behind the clouds, and they know that the sun is a source of heat. But they have never seen the sun in a cloudless sky. Contrast this with someone who lives in the Mediterranean. He sees the sun very clearly, and feels the heat of the sun on his skin. Is it the same sun for

¹¹ Phil Parshall, op cit, 177-178.

¹² Michael Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford 1987) 20.

both these people? Of course it's the same sun, although their mental image of the sun and their experience of the sun is very different.

If we accept the analogy, we can assume that Muslims and Christians are talking about the same God, even though their ideas of that God and their experience of him may differ considerably. If we cannot accept the analogy, we have to think in terms of two completely different planets, like the sun and the moon, and assume that Christians and Muslims are talking about two totally different beings.

3 When Paul is speaking to a Greek audience at the Areopagus in Acts 17 he doesn't hesitate to use the word *theos* both for the 'Unknown God' and for the God who raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 17:23-24, 30-31). He believes that there is enough in common between *their* concept of God and his concept of God for him to use the same word.¹³

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4 The vast majority of the converts and enquirers whom I have known or heard about assume that there is some real continuity between their knowledge and experience of God *before* and *after* their conversion. The experience of people like Bilquis Sheikh in *I Dared to call Him Father*¹⁴ points to continuity rather than discontinuity.

When converts take a totally negative view and want to repudiate everything in Islam, I suspect that there are two possible reasons: *either* it is because the only way they can feel secure in their new faith and in a new community is to cut themselves off from everything in their past; *or* it is because the Christians who taught them and disciplined them have taken a very negative attitude towards Islam.

I am well aware that many English translations of the Qur'an keep the Arabic *Allah* for God. This is largely, as I understand it, because Muslims are concerned about the possible confusion between God (with a capital G) and god (with a small g). I am also aware that Islamic governments in Malaysia and elsewhere have not allowed Christians to use Allah in recent translations of the Bible. I believe it can be argued against this view, however, that such practice is not true to the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet. Nothing in the Qur'an suggests that Muhammad ever believed that Jews and Christians, the People of the Book, were worshipping a different God. For example,

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him... (Sarah 3:64)

When Christians today follow the same practice in using Allah, they want to make the theological point that the God of Islam is totally different from the God of Christianity. I have to confess, however, that as one whose introduction to Islam has been through the language of Arabic, I have great difficulty in understanding this practice. If Arabic speaking Christians never think of using a different word for God, I can see no linguistic reason for us to use such a contrived way of speaking about God in Islam. And for the reasons I have outlined I cannot find any adequate theological reason for trying to distinguish between the word Allah and 'God' in Christianity.

¹³ See Myrtle Langley, *Paul in Athens: Pseudophilosophy or Proclamation? A Missiological Study of Acts 17:16-34* (Bulletin of the Evangelical Fellowship of Missionary Studies, No 10, 1980) 59-74.

¹⁴ Bilquis Sheikh, *I Dared To Call Him Father* (Eastbourne 1979).15

Is Islam inspired by the Devil?

If I have to give a short and immediate answer to this question, it would consist of two words: 'Yes... but'. In case I am laying myself open to misunderstanding, let me say right from the start that I do believe without hesitation that 'the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers...' (2 Cor 4:4). I do believe that 'our struggle is... against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of

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evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph 6:12). I do also believe that 'Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light' (2 Cor 11:14). I am convinced that all these verses are thoroughly relevant to our thinking about other faiths and ideologies.

I want to suggest, however, that there is a real danger in coming too easily and too quickly to the conclusion that Islam is a religion inspired by the Devil. Here are my six reasons for being hesitant about using these categories too freely in our teaching about Islam.

1 Why single out Islam for special mention? What about Communism? What about the godless Humanism of the West today? What about some of the demonic forces at work in parts of the Christian world, like Northern Ireland? When some Christians speak as if Islam is The Enemy No 1 in the world today, I wonder if they are not getting things out of proportion.

2 An overemphasis on the role of Satan in Islam can easily prevent us as Christians from facing up to the terrible record of the Christian church in its relations with Muhammad and his followers. Attributing everything in Islam to demonic forces allows us, so to speak, to 'pass the buck', and fail to recognize the responsibility of the Christian church in all that has happened. The very existence of Islam can be seen as a judgement on the Christian church, and the record of the church over 14 centuries in its relations with Islam should leave us with a sense of shame.

One of the things I learned in my first church history lectures from Harry Rowdon at LBC was that we should see church history as our history, and recognize Christians of the past as our people, as brothers and sisters in Christ, however much we may differ from them in points of doctrine. In talking with Muslims we will of course want to disassociate ourselves from the Crusades, just as open-minded Muslims often disassociate themselves from Idi Amin, Qaddhafi, or Khomeini. But resorting too quickly to the explanation that Islam is inspired by the Devil may mean that we are letting ourselves off the hook too lightly, and that we never recognize the responsibility of the Christian church for all that has happened in the past.

3 If we teach that all other religions are inspired by the Devil, some Christians jump to the conclusion that people of other faiths must therefore by definition be possessed by evil powers. If you think this sounds exaggerated, I must explain that I have more than once encountered this way of thinking in our students at Trinity, and I find it most in those who have been deeply influenced by the Charismatic Movement and the Signs and Wonders Movement. It is obvious that there are occult practices in some forms of Folk Islam, and I have no difficulty whatever in believing in demon possession. But I don't believe it is either true or helpful to suggest that *every* Muslim must be treated as a case of demonic possession.

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4 We are probably influenced more than we realize by stereotypes of Islam which we have inherited from the past. It wasn't for purely biblical and theological reasons that our forefathers in the Eastern churches and in Europe thought of Islam in these terms. There were many other cultural, political and psychological factors which were at work not so far below the surface. This is how Jean-Marie Gaudeuil makes the point, writing about the Middle Ages:

Europe elaborated instinctively an image of everything it repudiated and projected this image on Islam, the symbol of all that was 'un-Christian'... This was not deliberate, but instinctive: Europe had felt inferior to the Islamic civilization, it had received much from it: philosophy, the sciences, technology; unable as yet to express its own Culture in positive terms, Europe rejected in Islam whatever seemed to threaten its Christian identity.¹⁵

Norman Daniels, in his book *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image* shows very convincingly that many of the popular images and stereotypes of Muslims and Islam in the minds of Europeans and westerners today can be traced back to the writings of Christians in the Middle East and Europe in the Middle Ages.¹⁶

5 When I find Christians interpreting the contemporary revival of Islam, especially in the Middle East, simply in terms of the work of Satan, my reaction is to plead that this can lead to a terrible oversimplification of complex issues. This revival is to some extent a response to centuries of European colonialism, and we cannot understand what has been happening in countries like Iran if we do not even attempt to appreciate the many cultural, political and economic factors that have been involved. I believe we need to be aware that simple explanations expressed in purely spiritual terms can easily have the effect of preventing us from getting to grips with the complexities of history and politics.

6 Some Christians use the language of the demonic to explain things that are culturally strange and foreign to them. I remember some Christian friends saying to me before I first went to Cairo, that when they spent some days there they felt an atmosphere of evil in the city. I often used to think and worry about what they had said, because I came to love Cairo with all its crowds and dust and smells and broken pavements. Was it that I was spiritually blind to what was there in the atmosphere, or was it that my friends used the demonic to explain those aspects of the culture with which they couldn't cope?

Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in between. But my basic fear about explaining Islam in terms of the Satanic is that it can become an easy way out. It absolves us from the need to face up to those areas where judgement may need to begin with the household of God (1 Pet 4:17), and saves us from the hard work of coming to terms with

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all those pastoral, psychological, political and cultural factors which come into the equation. Is Islam inspired by the Devil? I hope it is clear from what I have said that my 'Buts' do not turn my original 'Yes' into a 'No!' They are intended not to make it 'die the death of a

¹⁵ Jean-Marie Gaudeuil, *Encounters and Clashes, Islam and Christianity in History* (Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Rome 1984) 130.

¹⁶ Norman Daniels, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh 1980).

thousand qualifications', but rather to qualify the simple 'Yes' and to encourage us to get beyond our favourite neat, simplistic answers.

Is there any revelation or salvation in Islam?

Once again I would suggest that we need to be cautious about the question itself, because it is framed in such a way as to invite a simple 'Yes' or 'No' for an answer. We therefore need to take revelation and salvation separately, and break the large question down into a number of smaller questions:

Revelation

Are we speaking about general revelation or special revelation?

I expect we would all want to reject the view that Muhammad received *special revelation*, in the sense that he received new revelations from God which had not been revealed before through the prophets, Jesus or the apostles. No doubt we would also be suspicious of the view that Muhammad's teaching was genuine revelation of a monotheism which was specially relevant and appropriate for the Arabs. Most of us would probably want to say that if he did receive any special revelation, it didn't come to him direct from God, but through what he learned from the Jews and Christians.

If, however, we're simply speaking about general revelation, we could say that any revelation Muhammad received was no different from the general revelation that is available to all men. Or we might want to argue that if Muhammad was a sincere seeker after God, any revelation he received was no different in principle from that given to a man like Cornelius before his conversion. This would mean that if God had real personal dealings with Muhammad (as I believe most strongly that he did), they were no different in kind from his dealings with all men who are seeking after God (Acts 17:27). Or again, using Charles Kraft's memorable phrase, we may want to think of Muhammad as being 'chronologically AD, but informationally BC'.¹⁷ In this case we might want to think that his experiences could have had something in common with people in the Old Testament like Gideon, or possibly even Elijah, even though he was in no sense part of God's salvation history which was worked out through the descendants of Abraham¹⁸.

How did the religion of Islam compare with the religion of Arabia?

We could argue that Islam was a distinct improvement on the pre-Islamic polytheism and idolatry of Arabia. We may therefore want to

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acknowledge that if the pre-Islamic religion of Arabia had much in common with Canaanite religion, Islam had (and still has) much in common with the monotheism of the Old Testament. On the other hand, we may want to argue that it is irrelevant to ask how close or how far Islam was from the religion of the Old Testament. The final product was a denial of Christianity, and this is all that matters.

¹⁷ Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll 1981) 252.

¹⁸ For further discussion see Colin Chapman, 'Thinking Biblically About Islam', *Themelios* (April 1978) 66-78. [http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/3.3_Chapman.pdf]

How are we to understand the development in the experience of Muhammad?

Many Christians are prepared to acknowledge that earlier in his life Muhammad was a sincere seeker after God. He had come to believe in the One Creator God, but didn't have the opportunity to read the Bible or find out the truth about Jesus. And because of choices that he made at certain stages in his ministry, he wandered away from the truth that he knew, and was further away from the truth at the end of his life than he was at the beginning. Other Christians answer this question, however, by saying that what matters is 'the finished product', namely his life and teaching as a whole, and that studying the development of his experience is therefore irrelevant.

How are we to understand Muhammad's rejection of Christianity?

Here again there are at least two possible answers we can give. We can say that what Muhammad rejected was at best a misunderstanding of the gospel, and at worst a travesty of the gospel. We simply do not know how Muhammad *would* have responded *if* he had had an opportunity to hear the true gospel. But because the Christianity he rejected was so imperfect, we cannot immediately put Muslims into the same category as Arians or Jehovah's Witnesses. The other answer would be that since Muhammad denied the deity of Christ and the cross, Islam must be seen as a heresy just like any other heresy, ancient or modern. It's irrelevant to ask 'what would have happened if he had known the true gospel?' How are we to understand the psychological processes of the so-called 'revelations' which came to Muhammad?

Some would say that the descriptions of Muhammad's practices and experiences in the Qur'an and the Hadith suggest that they had strong similarities with those of ascetics, monks and mystics etc. But since there isn't enough clear evidence, we need to look at the content of the revelations rather than the psychological processes involved. On the other hand, many Christians would not hesitate to say that Muhammad must have had dealings with the occult, and that any 'revelations' he received must have come from evil spirits.

Salvation

I fear that in this context we cannot avoid asking the difficult question:

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what about those who have not heard the gospel? Dick Dowsett's answer in *God, that's not fair*¹⁹ is very clear-cut and straightforward: the Bible teaches that only those who consciously respond to the gospel can be saved, and that the realization of this truth must be a basic motive for mission. Norman Anderson, however, expresses some reservations about this view, and is prepared to believe that God is able to read the hearts of all people and recognize whether or not a person expresses any kind of trust and repentance towards God²⁰. When he takes this view he is not saying that there is a way of salvation within Islam, but rather that it is perfectly possible that Muslims, not as Muslims, but as sinners who show genuine repentance and faith towards God, may experience salvation through Christ, even if they have not heard or understood the gospel. This is very different from Rahner's 'Anonymous

¹⁹ Dick Dowsett, *God That's Not Fair* (Sevenoaks 1982).

²⁰ Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Leicester 1984) 145-255.

Christianity,' which has been summed up by Lesslie Newbigin as 'conferring an *aegrotat* degree *in absentia* upon a non-matriculant who does not even believe in tertiary education.'²¹

If my discussion of this question leaves you none the wiser as to where I stand personally, let me assure you that whenever a Muslim asks me whether I believe Muhammad was a prophet, I simply reply, 'If I did believe that he was a prophet, I would be a Muslim', and he has no difficulty in seeing the point. I do believe that John 14:6 is relevant to Muslims, but I do not believe that Jesus is saying here that Muslims and non-Christians have no knowledge of God at all; he seems rather to be saying that no one can come to know God as Father, except through Jesus the Son.

When we come to the scriptures to find answers to our questions about who is going to be saved we need to be prepared to find different kinds of answers. I believe that Acts 4:12 is as uncompromising as it sounds: 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' But when someone asked Jesus, 'Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?' he gave an answer that the disciples probably didn't expect. He said in effect, 'Make sure that you yourselves enter through the narrow door! For some of the people that are most confident of their place in heaven will be turned away, and people from north, south, east and west will be welcomed into the kingdom. There are going to be some surprises in heaven!' (Luke 13:22-30).²²

What is true Islam?

No doubt we are all aware that one way of breaking the 9th Commandment ('You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour'—Exod 20:16) is to compare the worst in Islam with the best in Christianity. But there are other more subtle variations of this same

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sin—like accepting any and every action of Muslims as expressions of Islam, and judging the history of Islam in previous centuries by the moral standards of the 20th century. If, therefore, we want to make sure that we do not give false testimony against our Muslim neighbour, we need to be willing to ask this difficult question, and explore what is 'the real thing'.

In case we find that this discussion leads us into a maze, let me suggest the following as basic guidelines to help us to find our way through:

- 1 We must allow Muslims themselves to tell us what they believe is true Islam.
- 2 When we are not in a position to find out from Muslims themselves, we must use the criteria that Orthodox Muslims would use to distinguish between genuine Islam and distortions or perversions of Islam: ie does it conform to the teaching of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet?
- 3 We must apply the Golden Rule and remember how we deal with the difficult question of what is real Christianity. If we feel compelled to disassociate ourselves from the Crusades, or from particular actions and attitudes of Roman Catholics, of the Moral Majority or of

²¹ Lesslie Newbigin, quoted by Peter Cotterell in *The Eleventh Commandment: Church and Mission Today* (Leicester 1981) 15.

²² See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids 1978) 196-197.

Protestant Loyalist preachers in Northern Ireland, we must allow Muslims to do the same. This is nothing more nor less than the Golden Rule: 'Always treat others as you would like them to treat you' (Matt 7:12 NEB)

There are at least four areas in which I would suggest that this is the crucial question.

1 Folk Islam

How much of Folk Islam is true Islam? Do we see the true spirit of Islam in the Wahhabi protest against superstitions, the veneration of saints, and Sufi practices etc? Or would we have to say that Muhammad's incorporation into Islam of pre-Islamic rituals associated with pilgrimage to the Ka'abah suggests that this kind of folk religion is an inevitable and integral part of Islam even at its best and purest? I don't pretend to know the answer to this question. But it does need to be asked, because it is totally unfair of us to assume that everything that goes under the name of Folk Islam is true Islam. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones! How do we like it when Muslims look at Folk Christianity and assume that it is true Christianity?

2 Parshall's Contextualization

I come back to Parshall in this context because my greatest uneasiness about the way he argues his case is that he fails to ask the question: what is true Islam? When in his latest book he explores the possibility of converts remaining within the Muslim *ummah*, he never seems to stop to ask the question: What does Islam think of Muslims who renounce their faith and become Christians? He refers briefly and indirectly to the

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Law of Apostasy, but never discusses it in detail. This is partly deliberate, since his own experience in Bangladesh leads him to be reasonably optimistic.

I suspect, however, that the problem goes deeper than this. His refusal to tackle the Law of Apostasy means that he never faces up to the fact that if the *shari'ah* is upheld and applied consistently in the case of Muslims converting to Christianity, it is never going to be possible for Muslim converts to be accepted as disciples of 'Esa within the *ummah*. I can see good reasons for encouraging converts to remain within their own family and culture as much and as long as they possibly can, and am not arguing for a return to the old extractionism. But I cannot see how we can encourage them to think that they belong to the Islamic *ummah* and to the Body of Christ, both sociologically and theologically, at the same time. In so far as a Muslim community allows converts to remain totally within their own culture and community without any real dislocation, the Muslim community is not being genuinely Muslim. We can be thankful that this does sometimes happen. But when it does so, it may be proving the point of the saying 'the further from Mecca, the less pure the Islam'. And refusing to acknowledge what is true Islam in this area may mean that we don't help converts adequately to 'go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore' (Heb 13:13).

3 Islam and Israel

Bat Ye'or's book *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*²³ documents with frightening detail how Jews and Christians were often treated as *dhimmi*s, protected minorities in the Islamic Empire. Reviewers of the book have argued that she has oversimplified and

²³ Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (London and Toronto 1985).

overstated her case, if not actually distorted it.²⁴ Some moderate Muslims today claim that Islam has got beyond the *dhimma* system, and that it need not be an essential part of Islamic faith and practice in dealing with minorities.²⁵ But if Ismail Faruqi can be regarded as an authoritative spokesman of mainstream Orthodox Islamic thought, the Islamic solution to the problem of the Middle East is based fairly and squarely on the *dhimma* system and is breathtakingly simple: all the present nation states from Morocco to Pakistan should be turned into one Islamic State. The Zionist State of Israel must also be dismantled. Jews who have illegally seized lands from Arabs must return them or pay compensation; but any Jews who wish to remain are welcome to settle wherever they will within the Islamic *ummah* as *dhimmis*.²⁶

Because I believe that Faruqi expresses consistently the spirit of Orthodox Islam, I find myself caught in a very real dilemma over the Palestinian question at the present time. While I have the utmost sympathy for the Palestinians because of all the injustices that they have suffered, I cannot accept the *theological* basis of *Muslim* opposition to the state of Israel. Here, I would suggest, is an example of where Islam may be showing itself in its true colours to the modern world.

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4 Cragg's Ideal Islam

I can remember being present at a supper party in Cairo several years ago in the home of a leading member of the Episcopal Church, when Kenneth Cragg was present. What she said to him on that occasion went something like this: 'We Christians in the Muslim world admire your understanding of Islam, and we know that even Muslims recognize you as an authority. But we also feel that you make life difficult for us, because you present such an ideal kind of Islam; in fact we feel that you can present Islam in a far more convincing and attractive way than Muslims themselves can ever do!'

What is it that drives Cragg in this direction? Christopher Lamb finds the key to Cragg's approach in the twin concepts of Hospitality and Embassy:

Hospitality involves not only the personal inviting of Muslims into one's home and as one's friend, but also the openness to Muslim society and understanding... Hospitality... is best understood as a hospitality to the mind and heart of Islam itself. Cragg believes that by opening ourselves to the message of the Qur'an and the understanding of Muslims recorded in the voluminous literature of Islam Christians with a proper perception can truly find 'Islamic reasons for being Christian'.

Likewise, embassy means not only speaking the word of Christ in Muslim lands but also the determination to be fully 'resident' in those lands and at home where they are ... The Christian missionary aims 'to help Islam to a more critical awareness of itself'. In other words, Muslims must be persuaded and urged to ask the kind of questions which will turn out to have Christian answers²⁷.

²⁴ Jorgen S Nielson, Review in *Newsletter of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations*, no 15, May 1986, 26-32.

²⁵ Quoted by Gabriel Habib in *Christian-Muslim Issues in the Middle East in Christian-Muslim Encounter in the Middle East* (Middle East Council of Churches, Geneva, no 4/5, July/August 1985) 31.

²⁶ Ismail R al Faruqi, 'Islam and Zionism' in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed John L Esposito (Oxford 1983) 261-267.

²⁷ Christopher Lamb, *The Missionary Theology of Kenneth Cragg*, unpublished paper of the Islam Panel of CMS, 1987.

If Cragg begins, therefore, with a desire to listen to the call of the minaret and appreciate Islam at its very best, he isn't content just to listen. And in pointing Muslims to 'the Christ whom they have missed', he believes that we have a mission not only to individual Muslims, but also to Islam as a whole. So if it seems at times that he is 'reading Christian meanings into Islamic concepts'²⁸, it is because he judges everything in Islam by the measure of Christ and aims at nothing less than 'recruitment to Christ'.²⁹

How should we respond to the spread of Islam in the west?

At this point we come nearer home and down to earth! I hope I can take it for granted that we believe in the sovereignty of God at work in history, and that we recognize both the obligation and the opportunity to share the gospel with the Muslims in our midst. But while—or even perhaps before—we do that, we need to face up to a whole cluster of challenges which have as much to do with psychology, culture and

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politics as with theology and mission. For what we are dealing with here is not just the question of how we think of Islam and how we evangelize Muslims, but the gut reaction of white, British Christians to a growing community of Asians and Arabs settled in our midst.

What I want to do, therefore, is to articulate as clearly and honestly as possible the instinctive reactions that many of us have, and which we sometimes put into words, and then suggest how I personally try to bring them into the light of the gospel.

1 'The Muslims are aiming to convert Europe, and they see Britain as a key to the conversion of Europe and the West.'

Yes! But let us recognize that for every Muslim in Britain who has a strong evangelistic vision, there are dozens of Muslims who are only interested in the survival of the present Muslim community in Britain. They are so concerned to hold on to their young people and protect them from the influence of our godless society that they have little interest in spreading the gospel of Islam. There are many groups which are actively spreading the message of Islam; and the church needs to be aware that they are not interested in the kind of open-ended dialogue which many Christian leaders are calling for. But although a number of individuals have converted to Islam, I personally do not foresee vast numbers of white British people becoming Muslims, largely because Islam still appears so culturally foreign in this country.

2 'They are using their oil wealth to finance the spread of Islam.'

True! But how much did the modern missionary movement owe to the wealth created by the Industrial Revolution in Europe? And are the Muslims doing anything in principle that we haven't done?

²⁸ Albert Hourani, 'Muslims and Christians' in *Europe and the Middle East* (London 1980) 76.

²⁹ Christopher Lamb, *op cit*.

A recent newspaper article refers to the Archbishop of Kenya expressing concern about petrodollars being used to win Christians to Islam. It also reports the reply given by Professor Ali Hillal Dessouki of Cairo University in a public lecture in Nairobi:

that Muslims today were behaving similarly to the first Christian missionaries who came to evangelise Africa.

Like Muslims today... the early missionaries used all available human and material resources, including money, to conduct their evangelistic work ... Muslims had as much right as Christians to continue to evangelise Africans...³⁰

3 *'They have no right to ask for the implementation of Islamic law in Britain.'*

But is there any reason, either legal or theological, why they should not ask for halal meat for Muslims in schools and in prisons? When Christians suggest that Muslims want the whole legal system in this

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country to be abolished and for us to adopt *shari'ah* law, I fear that they are playing on people's fears about 'the thin end of the wedge' and 'the domino theory'. Muslims in this country at the present time are in a very strange and un-Islamic situation, because they live as *dhimmis* in a post-Christian, secular, pluralistic democratic state. The Qur'an never envisaged Muslims living in that kind of situation, and I suspect that while Judaism has had to develop a theology of Diaspora, Muslims have hardly begun to develop a theology to explain the situation in which they find themselves in the west. We are not in Malaysia or Singapore, and the total Islamization which is held up by many Christians as the end of the slippery slope could never take place in this country unless the vast majority of the country converted to Islam.

4 *'They should not be allowed to press for Islamic schools.'*

But they already have several independent Islamic schools, and provided they can maintain the standards set by the DES, they have every legal right to have as many independent schools as they can support. The crucial question is whether the government should allow them to have Islamic schools within the state system on the same basis as Jewish, Catholic and Anglican schools. We may not want Britain to become divided into many different ghetto communities; but we need to have very convincing reasons if we decide that one section of the community should not have the same rights as those which are enjoyed by other sections of the community.

5 *'They should adapt to our culture—when in Rome...'*

But is this how the British have behaved when they have gone overseas? If we seldom adopt this principle when we live and settle overseas, do we have any right to expect that Muslims should do the same in our country?

6 *'The government should resist the spread of Islam.'*

³⁰ *Church of England Newspaper*, 8 January 1988.

I have heard of one Christian leader expressing the wish in private that the government would turn all mosques in this country into public conveniences. There are at least two assumptions here which I would want to challenge: (1) that our government is in the same position as the kings of Judah in the Old Testament period; and (2) that Christian attitudes to Islam should be the same as the attitudes to Canaanite religion called for in parts of the Old Testament. If some Muslims are behaving in such a way as to threaten law and order in our society, there is every reason for our government to be concerned. But there is no other reason for which we could possibly expect our government to resist the spread of Islam. Since we live *after* the Incarnation, and *after* Pentecost, and *after* Paul's address at the Areopagus, some expressions

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of this view seem to me to represent a sad regression to a way of thinking that is less than Christian.

7 *'Islam has no right to be here!'*

Even if it is not expressed in these terms, I cannot help feeling that this is the feeling which lies near the heart of many of our responses. What right have they got to bring their foreign religion into Christian Britain?

Perhaps instead we should be saying: 'Now at last we ought to know what it has been like for them to be at the receiving end of our missionary work for 200 years! Are they doing anything in principle in our country which we haven't done in theirs?'

While, therefore, we must not be naive about what is happening, we need to be aware of the opposite danger, which is to appeal to people's fears of a great, sinister conspiracy. If we give in to this approach, I suggest that we may be reacting to the situation in an Islamic rather than a Christian way.

It is very important that those who are involved in discussion of these issues with Muslim leaders should have had some experience of living in Muslim countries, and know what it is like for Christian minorities there. At certain times it may be right for us to say to Muslim leaders, 'Are you willing to grant to Christian minorities in Muslim countries these same rights which you are demanding for yourselves here in Britain?' But if we do so, we must be as certain of our facts and as aware of all the implications as Keston College has been in all that it has done for Christians behind the Iron Curtain. And if we are looking in the Old Testament for guidance about our basic attitudes, the best place to find it is not in the commands to 'tear down the altars of Baal' (eg Deut 12:1-3), but in the command to 'love the stranger' (Lev 19:33-34; Exod 22:21; 23:9).³¹

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Max Warren, former general secretary of the Church Missionary Society, used to say that the challenge of western agnosticism and science would turn out in the long run to have been 'as

³¹ See further Christopher Lamb and Roger Hooker, *Love the Stranger* (London 1987).

child's play' compared with the challenge of other faiths.³² Montgomery Watt, the Christian Islamicist, who until his retirement was also an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church in Scotland, has made a similar claim, but more specifically about the challenge of Islam:

It is hardly too much to say that the intellectual challenge to Christianity from Islam at the present time is greater than any challenge Christians have had to meet for fifteen centuries, not excluding that from natural science.³³

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Perhaps we won't know whether such a bold claim is justified until well on into the 21st century. But if there is any truth in it, the whole church needs to be alerted to the challenge, and not just those who have a special calling to work among Muslims. And if the challenge is to be faced anywhere, it needs to be faced in theological education.

At the very least it means that every student who studies theology almost anywhere in the world must from now on spend some time studying Islam. If the life and teaching of Muhammad are just as significant as the life and teaching of Arius, the study of Islam can no longer be left as an option for a few enthusiasts. Although colleges like the London Bible College have found ways of introducing other faiths into the core curriculum, other colleges don't find it so easy, since in a curriculum that is already overloaded, any new subject has to be added at the expense of an existing subject. Thankfully, however, the booklet with the significant title *Theology on Full Alert* (by Christopher Lamb and Kenneth Cracknell)³⁴ provides a fascinating account of many creative attempts which have been made to introduce the other-faiths dimension into theological teaching.

But then, what next? Once the subject has found a place in the curriculum, there's always a danger that the other teachers pursue their own disciplines in exactly the same way, working almost in watertight compartments, and leaving it to the Islamicists and the Missiologist to think about Islam. What I want to suggest is that what is needed now is an interdisciplinary approach. The challenge facing us is to find ways of allowing Islam to impinge on almost every discipline of theology. If we have had to tackle western agnosticism in church history, philosophy, in doctrine and in biblical studies, could it not be that the next step for us is to start *answering Islamic questions* in each one of these disciplines, instead of simply answering the questions which have been raised within a purely western, Christian context?

What would it mean in practice? In July 1986 I spent some time in Jeddah, and the nearest I got to Mecca was the by-pass which has to be taken by non-Muslims. Seeing the world from that vantage point put theological education in a completely new perspective for me, and it was during that week that I prepared a list of questions concerning Islam which I wanted to put to my colleagues at Trinity College, Bristol. Here is a sample of those questions:

1 Islam and the Old Testament

1) Why do Muslims believe it was Ishmael whom Abraham tried to offer as a sacrifice? Can we be sure that Ishmael was the father of the Arabs? Is there any evidence outside the Qur'an

³² Max Warren, quoted by Wilfred Cantwell-Smith in *Christianity and Other Religions*, eds John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (London 1980) 91.

³³ W Montgomery Watt, *Times Literary Supplement*, Insert on Islam, 30 April 1976, 513.

³⁴ Christopher Lamb and Kenneth Cracknell, *Theology on Full Alert* (London, revised edition, 1987).

to support the association of Abraham and Isaac with the Ka'abah? Can Islam be seen in any way as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael in Genesis 15?

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- 2) How much does Islam have in common with the religion of the Old Testament?
- 3) What are the similarities and differences between the story of Joseph as recorded in Genesis and in the Qur'an (Surah 12)? What do these similarities and differences tell us about Islam?

2 Islam and the New Testament

- 1) Is it possible to trace in the gospels the stages by which the disciples, all strictly orthodox Jews, holding firmly to the unity of God, came to believe that Jesus was 'more than a prophet'? Could this help us to see how Muslims can come to see Jesus in a new light?
- 2) Is it possible to put on one side centuries of discussion about the Trinity in the context of Greek, Roman and European civilizations, and go back to the New Testament to work out ways of expressing our belief in the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity that are easier for the Muslim to understand and cause less unnecessary offence? If traditional Christian formulations have been influenced so much by Western vocabulary and thought forms, is it possible and desirable to get back to the more Semitic vocabulary and thought forms of the New Testament writers? 3) Is it possible to believe in Jesus as fully God and fully man without using the title 'son of God' which is so offensive to Muslims?

3 Islam and doctrine

- 1) What solution did Islam offer to the Christological controversies of the first five centuries?
- 2) What evidence is there that Muhammad and his followers were influenced by heretical Christian teachers?
- 3) How have the great theologians of the past (eg Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin) and the great theologians of the 20th century (eg Barth, Brunner, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg etc) thought about other religions in general and about Islam in particular?

4 Islam and church history

- 1) How much did Muhammad owe to the example of Byzantium in his understanding of power and of the relationship between political and religious authority? If Protestants have traditionally believed in the need to separate church and state, what examples are there of Christians before and after Muhammad who have used the same formula as Islam in their thinking about power?
- 2) How are we to account for the collapse of Christianity in North Africa as a result of the spread of Islam in the centuries after Muhammad?
- 3) What can we learn from the uneasy relationship between Christendom and the world of Islam during the Middle Ages?

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4) What kind of record does the church have in the way it has treated minorities and heretics? How does its record compare with the record of Islam in its treatment of minorities, especially Jews and Christians?

Some months ago I shared these questions with my colleagues at a faculty seminar at Trinity College. Inevitably they felt somewhat threatened because they knew little about Islam, and were cautious about venturing outside their own disciplines! They did, however, grasp the basic idea, and agreed that the next stage would be to hold a forum with the whole college community, in which I would ask each one of them questions of this kind related to their own discipline. If it achieves nothing else, I hope it drives home the point that the challenge of Jehovah's Witnesses is peanuts compared to the challenge of Islam. And if we as a church are to face up to the challenge, we need the resources of every discipline of theological study.

My vision, therefore, is that such a reorientation in theological study might produce a new generation of pastors and lay leaders (both at home and overseas) who know something about Islam, who have been trained to think biblically and theologically about Islam, and who have some idea of how they can mobilize and equip the whole church to face the challenge of Islam. We might help missionaries to learn disciplines of study and debate which would give them some of the tools they may need to wrestle with the hard questions they will face. And the leaders of our missionary societies would be better equipped to undergird all their strategizing for Muslim evangelism with serious biblical and theological thinking.

CONCLUSION

If we return finally to the question in our title 'Going soft on Islam?' you may be left wondering: who does the cap fit? You will no doubt have noticed that I have expressed as many reservations about 'hardline' approaches as about those which are thought to be 'soft'. So if you are inclined to think that the cap fits people like me, I hope you may be persuaded that the issues we are dealing with are far too serious and far too complex for us to allow ourselves to be polarized into two camps.

I also hope that I may have convinced you:

1 that there is more than one response to Islam which can claim to be genuinely evangelical;

2 that we need to be asking the right questions, if we hope to find the right answers; and

3 that we have a long way to go in working out the implications of all this for theological education.

If you find yourself in strong disagreement with some of the personal views I have expressed, I hope you can still own me without too much difficulty as a graduate of LBC! Thanks to that missionary preacher, I

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am still living in John 8 and Ephesians 6. But I would suggest that the issues I have tried to discuss have a lot to do with 'the breastplate of righteousness', the 'shoes' which represent 'the readiness to announce the Good News of peace', 'the shield of faith', the 'helmet of salvation', the 'sword of the Spirit', and finally with the prayer that we and the whole church

Colin Chapman, "Going Soft on Islam?" *Vox Evangelica* 19 (1989): 7-32.

of Christ will 'fearlessly make known' to the House of Islam 'the mystery of the gospel' (Eph 6:10-26).

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