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Carol Ann Norcross

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A Critical Study of the Rôle of Personal Encounter  
in the Development of Christian-Muslim Relations.

Carol Ann Norcross

Abstract

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The bibliography at the end of the study is divided into primary and secondary source material. The introduction indicates the limits and scope of the thesis. Chapter 1 presents a conceptual framework for personal encounter using ideas from the work of Martin Buber and Michael Polanyi. Chapter 2 is a case study of the international conference on "Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah" held at Chambésy in June 1976. The report on the conference is summarised and analysed in the light of the principles outlined in Chapter 1. This analysis evidences certain historico-cultural and religious pre-suppositions operative within the encounter. Chapters 3 and 4 take up a detailed exposition of these pre-suppositions. The method adopted is that of describing and analysing Christian and Muslim contemporary missionary writings which are founded upon the pre-suppositions in question. Assessment is made of the effect of such pre-suppositions on the past development of Christian-Muslim relations, and on the ideal of personal encounter as it might be practised in the present. Chapter 5 is a concluding chapter which serves a dual purpose: firstly, it summarises the findings of the study, and secondly, it indicates the rôle of personal encounter in the development of Muslim-Christian relations in Britain, both for the present and the future. Three areas of encounter are indicated: the use of study centres and conferences; neighbourhood meetings; and religious education within schools. It is concluded that the adoption of the principles of personal encounter in these three areas is likely to be the most fruitful way forward in Christian-Muslim relations.

A Critical Study of the Rôle of Personal Encounter  
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21 NOV 1988

## Acknowledgements

I should like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my teachers, helpers and guides in the researching and compiling of this thesis: Professor Edward Hulmes of the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, who patiently tutored me from beginning to end; Dr David Kerr, Director of the Centre for the Study of Islam, and Christian-Muslim Relations, and Dr Hasan Askari of the same Centre, who also helped me; and finally Miss Ann Eames for patiently and efficiently typing the thesis.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to formulate a concept of personal encounter which can then be applied to the development of Christian-Muslim relations. The formulation is worked out on the basis of existentialist ideas taken from the work of Martin Buber, and epistemological ideas taken from Michael Polanyi's seminal book, Personal Knowledge. The characteristics of personal encounter are identified and analysed. The framework for personal encounter which emerges is theoretical, but none the less existential in that it is founded upon an observation of human interaction, and is envisaged as possible of attainment in practice. Chapter 1 deals with the formulation.

Chapter 2 proceeds to a consideration of a recent example of Christian-Muslim personal encounter - the missionary conference at Chambésy in 1976. This case study was chosen not only because the grouping of international leaders was small, and therefore informal, but also because concern for mission must be seen as pivotal in the development of relations between the two faiths. The extensive report on the conference has been analysed in order to assess how far the principles of personal encounter were put into practice. The results of the analysis show that a certain measure of personal encounter was achieved, but that the influence of deep-seated pre-suppositions prevented the full experience of personal encounter.

The main part of the thesis, Chapters 3 and 4, is taken up

with an extended analysis of the pre-suppositions, historical, cultural and religious, which came to light at the Chambésy conference, and prevented the full attainment of personal encounter. The method chosen for the analysis is that of using contemporary Christian and Muslim missionary writings in order to illuminate the nature of the pre-suppositions, and what part they have played in the hindering of personal encounter in the past. Any attempt to trace in detail the history of Christian-Muslim relations was considered inappropriate to the aims of the thesis. However, where historical and colonial considerations have entered into the uncovering of present pre-suppositions, Muslim and Christian, then these have been investigated and incorporated.

From the point of view of religious pre-suppositions, it has been recognised that both Islam and Christianity constitute two extremely varied and complex realities. No attempt can be made, within the limits of this thesis, to offer a comprehensive presentation of each faith. Therefore, a certain criterion of selection of data has been used. Given that adherents of each faith evidence a variety of approaches to, and interpretations of, the central beliefs and practices involved, a choice has been made of expositions of faith which come from those sections of each community actively involved in interfaith dialogue. From the Christian side, this has meant representation of Evangelical Protestantism, mainline Protestantism, and mainline Roman Catholicism. From the Muslim side, the representation is predominantly that of Sunni Islam as expounded by its revivalist

spokesmen, but there is also a small representation of the Shi'i community element. Again, it is where these representations - of doctrine, worship and morality - are called for within the elucidation of pre-suppositions that they have been summarised and incorporated.

The final chapter draws together the findings of the study and indicates, in three practical areas, how the rôle of personal encounter could affect the development of Christian-Muslim relations in Britain today. The main conclusion of the thesis is that the practice of personal encounter constitutes the surest epistemological basis for the building of productive relations between Muslims and Christians, and that it is the most appropriate response for Christians faced with the challenge of Muslim aspirations in the late twentieth century.

## Chapter 1. A conceptual framework for personal encounter.

The problematic of formulating any conceptual framework, or paradigm, is well expressed by Paul Knitter.

"... models (or "types" or "paradigms") can be very useful in mapping a complex, diversified theological territory ... In their unavoidable generality, models cannot capture the exceptions and the diversity of opinion within the terrain they try to define."<sup>1</sup>

The theological territory this present study tries to map is complex and diversified for two reasons. The first is that both Christianity and Islam, as religious systems, are caught up in the evolution of a new age. As subjects of, and participants in, radical cultural change, Christians and Muslims are in a state of far-reaching reappraisal. This makes clarification of self-identity, for individuals and communities, a confused and confusing affair. Within the context of personal encounter, the confusion becomes particularly evident, and easily leads to hardened defences or sheer frustration. A conceptual framework for personal encounter applicable to Christians and Muslims cannot expect to order neatly the forces of scientism, pluralism, revivalism, nationalism and religious zeal which inevitably are part of the encounter. What it can hope to do is to clarify the

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1. Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name?, p.XII (Full bibliographical details of all books referred to are available at the end of the thesis).



nature of these forces and give some indication of how their negative effects can be mitigated and their positive effects reinforced.

A second reason for complexity is that the very nature of personal encounter implies the uncontrollable, the unforeseeable, the indefinable, that which defies systematization. In dealing with the personal one steps outside the terrain of the purely objective into that of the subjective. Here one has to deal with the transcendent and ineffable in human knowing. Any attempt at systemization is bound to fall far short of the mark. But the justification is, again, a service of clarification: the broad contours of the terrain of personal encounter can be mapped, and then used as guidelines for analysis of Christian-Muslim relations.

The dangers of generalisations also are real. Not all Christians form a homogenous group, and neither do Muslims. The effects of religious tradition and cultural belonging vary greatly within each community, and the effects individuals have on tradition and culture are equally diverse.<sup>2</sup> Yet given such qualifications, and bearing them in mind, the use of a conceptual framework has its advantages. It can delineate the main areas of

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2. The point is made by Wilfred Cantwell Smith in The meaning and End of Religion. "A man's faith is what his tradition means to him ..." p.159; and "...the mundane traditions persist only in so far as they are refreshed each generation anew, by the faith of each of the participants". p.161.

agreement or disagreement operative between adherents of the two faiths. It can also highlight for each ways in which the practice of personal encounter can be improved. We turn then to the formulation of a useful framework.

The first element of importance to note is that personal encounter, as a praxis, is rooted in a specific epistemology, that of the personal. Person is established as primary.<sup>3</sup> But person, by definition, cannot exist in isolation; only in relation: thus for Martin Buber - "The one primary word is a combination I-Thou."<sup>4</sup> The world of person is a world of relation:-

"I perceive something: I am sensible of something: I imagine something: I will something: I feel something: I think something..."

This and the like establish the realm of It.

But the realm of Thou has a different basis. When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing.

...When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation."<sup>5</sup>

That to be person is to be in relation is taken up by Paul

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3. One of the chief architects of this personal epistemology is Martin Buber. "It is Buber's signal achievement to have so expressed the nature of the personal that it may now reclaim its right to be taken seriously." Ronald Gregor Smith, translator's introduction to Martin Buber, I and Thou, p.viii.
  4. Martin Buber, I and Thou, p.3.
  5. Ibid., p.4.

Knitter, but from a scientific rather than a poetic stance.

Referring to the insights of the "new physics" he writes:

"At its deepest, subatomic level, the world did not seem to show any "basic building blocks" or "beings", but rather an intricate, ever changing, and inter-relating process of activity or becoming. It was especially the new physics that prompted philosophers to a further insight into the way things are: if everything is a becoming rather than a being, the becoming takes place through inter-relating. If we can be only if we become, we can become only if we reach out and relate... It is difficult to grasp this as literally true for we still look upon things as substances rather than events; we deem ourselves primarily individuals rather than partners."<sup>6</sup>

Thus for Western man, a person-based epistemology represents a challenge to his world-view, and a challenge to his erstwhile unquestioned individual and racial self-sufficiency. "Gradually but with mounting urgency we are realizing today that in order to answer the perennial question "Who am I?", we have to ask the question "Who are you?"<sup>7</sup> What the I-Thou of Buber amounts to is an alternative epistemology to Western objectivity.

The latter implication has been developed extensively by Michael Polanyi. He formulates his thesis in Personal Knowledge as the need for a "post-critical philosophy" if Western culture is to experience a revival.<sup>8</sup> He pleads for a new epistemological

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6. P. Knitter, No Other Name?, p.8. These initial considerations lay the foundations for Knitter's thesis which is that all believers are moving into a new age of personal, interfaith encounter which calls for a new inter-dependence.
  7. Ibid. p.11.

starting point, and framework, which will release the West from the constraints of Enlightenment scientific objectivity. The change involved, he maintains, is as radical as that brought in by Augustine in the fifth century which laid the foundations of mediaeval Christendom. Augustine's work "brought the history of Greek philosophy to a close by inaugurating for the first time a post-critical philosophy."<sup>9</sup> "This example is particularly relevant to our time because the "turn" which brought Europe into its modern period of brilliance was the opposite of that effected by Augustine ... It was the vision of the Greek philosophers and the Roman law-givers, not of the biblical prophets and apostles which inspired the age of which we are the heirs".<sup>10</sup>

It is Polanyi's contention that "modern man has set up as the ideal of knowledge the conception of natural science as a set of statements which is 'objective'."<sup>11</sup> He maintains that such objective scientific knowledge treated as the sole criterion of knowledge is a truncated form of human knowing because it creates a false dichotomy between the exercise of the intellect and the engagement of the whole person. Rather, objective knowledge must

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8. Lesslie Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, pp.23-25. Use has been made here of a precis of Polanyi's thesis worked out by Newbigin.
  9. M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, quoted in Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.24.
  10. L. Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.24.
  11. M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p.15. (References hereafter are taken directly from Polanyi's book.)

be integrated into the functioning of the whole person.

An epistemology which engages the whole person is the second element of importance to be noted in a conceptual framework for personal encounter. According to Buber, the "primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being."<sup>12</sup> The characteristics of a holistic epistemology are that the person in a relation of I-Thou relates directly, (not through a system of ideas or stereotypes),<sup>13</sup> he relates within the present moment, (not within categories created by the past),<sup>14</sup> and he accepts the risk of suffering that the complete gift of self involves.<sup>15</sup> The latter characteristic results from the unreserve inherent in the engagement of the whole person. "He who gives himself to it (i.e. the I-Thou relation) may withhold nothing of himself."<sup>16</sup> This is because the act of relation, of coming to know with the whole being, pre-supposes responsibility, or the ability to respond. Buber develops this idea more fully in Between Man and Man. He points out how another in relation "'says something' to me ..."<sup>17</sup>... "a word demanding an answer has happened to me

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12. M. Buber, I and Thou, p.3.

13. Ibid. p.11.

14. Ibid. pp.12-13.

15. Ibid. p.11.

16. Ibid. p.10.

17. M. Buber, Between Man and Man, p.9.

..."<sup>18</sup>... "it remains the question of a questioner and will have its answer."<sup>19</sup>

"Though far from being equal to it, yet I know that in the claim I am claimed and may respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and demands a response."<sup>20</sup>

Polanyi, in his treatment of the holistic nature of personal knowledge, draws upon the findings of Gestalt psychology. Using such examples as a pianist playing a piece, a driver driving a car, an actor overcome by stage fright, he concludes that there are two kinds of awareness: subsidiary and focal (or subjective and objective).<sup>21</sup> In personal knowledge, the two are wholly integrated: knowledge becomes "a commitment of ourselves, a manner of disposing of ourselves."<sup>22</sup> Thus, integrated knowing implies not only the involvement of the whole person but also his full commitment. The knowing person experiences a 'response-ability' towards something far greater than self, something universal in its urgency and application.

"The inherent structure of this fundamental act of personal knowing makes us both necessarily participate in its shaping and acknowledge its results with universal intent ... It is the act of commitment in its full structure that saves

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18. Ibid. p.10.

19. Ibid. p.12..

20. Ibid. p.14.

21. See M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p.55ff.

22. Ibid. p.61.

personal knowledge from being merely subjective."<sup>23</sup>

From the foregoing considerations, it is legitimate to conclude that a third element integral to the concept of personal encounter is its essentially moral and religious nature. Buber writes with poetic succinctness - "... love is between I and Thou ... love is responsibility of an I for a Thou."<sup>24</sup> Religiously, there is a transcendent quality in the I-Thou relation: "... in each Thou we address the eternal Thou."<sup>25</sup> For, "he who practises real responsibility in the life of dialogue does not need to name the speaker of the word to which he is responding - he knows him in the word's substance which presses on and in, assuming the cadence of an inwardness, and stirs him in his heart of hearts."<sup>26</sup> "A man can ward off with all his strength the belief that "God" is there, and he tastes him in the strict sacrament of dialogue."<sup>27</sup>

At certain points, Polanyi's imagery too enters into the realm of the religious. He speaks of the "ineffable" character of personal knowledge,<sup>28</sup> and of an "indwelling" through

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23. Ibid. p.65.

24. M. Buber, I and Thou, pp. 14-15.

25. Ibid. p.6.

26. M. Buber, Between Man and Man, p.17.

27. M. Buber, I and Thou, p.39.

28. See M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p.91.

"contemplation" being of its essence.<sup>29</sup>

Of what, then, does the actual framework of personal encounter consist? What are its lived, practical components?<sup>30</sup> The suggestion made here is that there are three major components, of graded importance, which constitute the personal knowledge or encounter described by Buber and Polanyi. They are: a) a dramatic enactment of a dualistic situation, b) the bringing about of a relationship, and c) the emergence of true personal encounter. The three can be viewed, and experienced, as stages, one and two developing into three, but it is possible, where there is unusual initial openness, trust and courage, for persons to bypass the first two stages entering straightway into the third.

In the first stage, that of a dualistic situation, those who enter an encounter perceive themselves as autonomous cells or units. Personal autonomy is a good: "The stronger the I of the primary word I-Thou is in the twofold I, the more personal is the man."<sup>31</sup> But absolute personal autonomy destroys the possibility of encounter. In this connection, Buber points to three kinds of dialogue: genuine dialogue, technical dialogue, and monologue. (Reversed, they represent the three stages presently under

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29. See *ibid.* p.196ff.

30. Acknowledgment is due to Dr Hasan Askari of the Centre for the Study of Islam, and Christian-Muslim Relations, Birmingham, for assistance in the working out of the framework that follows.

31. M. Buber, I and Thou, p.65.

consideration).

"There is genuine dialogue - no matter whether spoken or silent - where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. There is technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding. And there is monologue disguised as dialogue ... a conversation characterized by the need neither to communicate something, nor to learn something, nor to influence someone, nor to come into connexion with someone, but solely by the desire to have one's own self-reliance confirmed by marking the impression that is made ..."<sup>32</sup>

Monologue occurs "when a man withdraws from accepting with his essential being another person in his particularity - a particularity which is by no means to be circumscribed by the circle of his own self .. For then dialogue becomes a fiction, the mysterious intercourse between two human worlds only a game, and in the rejection of the real life confronting him the essence of all reality begins to disintegrate."<sup>33</sup> Some measure of personal autonomy has to be relinquished.

In the second stage, a measure of relatedness is established, (cf. Buber's "technical dialogue"), but it is dependent upon the situation which brought together the partners

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32. M. Buber, Between Man and Man, pp. 19-20.

33. Ibid. pp. 23-24. In the second chapter, "The Question of the Single One", Buber explores the history of the phenomenon of Western individualism - a pre-supposition strongly operative within Christian partners in encounter with Muslims.

(for example a conference or forum for representation), and upon the resources - moral, cultural, religious, spiritual - available with the partners. Relatedness (not yet relation) becomes the crux of the challenge. Both stages one and two must be transcended for personal encounter to happen because they are built upon the foundations of a solely objective epistemology. Only stage three builds upon a personal epistemology.

In stage three, relation qualifies the sense of autonomy in each of the partners. (The reader is referred back to the earlier discussion on person and relation.) "Relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it."<sup>34</sup> The other ceases to be an It, and "steps forth and becomes a presence."<sup>35</sup> As has been indicated already, an I-Thou based encounter engages the whole person and involves a personal commitment. Within the dynamics of the encounter situation, (i.e. of stage three) personal commitment means openness to the unknown, to the "unspecifiable implications of the knowledge acquired by the act of commitment."<sup>36</sup> It means likewise, as a corollary, a willingness to be changed. "The depth of the cognitive commitment may be measured ... by the ensuing change in our outlook."<sup>37</sup> Only when openness and a willingness to change are operative can personal encounter assume a form for the

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34. M. Buber, I and Thou, p.15.

35. M. Buber, Between Man and Man, p.22.

36. M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p.317.

37. Ibid. p.318.

future. This form is both horizontal and vertical: horizontal in that mutuality and conflict will be experienced, and vertical in that transcendence also will be part of the experience.

To sum up at this point: a concept of personal encounter is founded upon a personal epistemology which establishes I-Thou as the primary word. It involves a commitment of the whole person leading to a change of outlook. It is essentially a moral and religious event in which the qualities of love are called forth, and a dimension of the transcendent experienced through mutuality.

As applied to interfaith encounter, this framework acquires certain more specific characteristics. First and foremost, according to Dr. Askari (see note 30 above), interfaith encounter is a spiritual event. Subject to the winds of the Spirit, it is unpredictable, ungiven (by the partners to each other), and its outcome can never be planned or designed. For God may use the self-expression of dialogue as a means of his self-revelation. Therefore, encounter must be dialogical (as opposed to monological) through and through. In this spiritual event each one's personal relationship with God is "pictured" through dialogue. Hence there is absolute need for inner openness to God, otherwise encounter is simply a strategy. In this openness to God, each partner gives themselves to the other, but the offering is to God. In this way, a transcendence is experienced through the interchange of persons which is not possible between "representatives". Each one hears the word of God through the other and is baffled! This is the disturbing, transforming work

of the Spirit.

Similar points form the construct for interfaith encounter offered by Paul Knitter, although the expression is more technical. Knitter offers three main points.<sup>38</sup> The first is that dialogue "must be based on personal religious experience and firm truth claims". The partners must be "religious" persons and "must belong, in some form, to a particular religious tradition." Further, religious dialogue cannot be "built on epoche...". "Partners in religious dialogue must bring themselves to that dialogue - most importantly their religious selves."

Secondly, Knitter claims that dialogue must be based on openness to the work of God, i.e. "on the recognition of the possible truth in all religions." In this, "it requires each partner to presume the truth of the others' positions ...". Inherent in such a presumption is the recognition "that there must be the same ultimate reality, the same divine presence, the same fullness and emptiness - in Christian terms, the same God - animating all religions and providing the ultimate goal and ground of dialogue."<sup>39</sup> Without this there can be no religious experience of transcendence. Even further, "all involved must admit to the possibility and necessity of entering into the religious

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38. See P. Knitter, pp.207-216. The three points are summarised below.

39. In regard to this point, it must be noted that Knitter wishes to dissociate himself from the quest for essence (see Chapter 3 of his book, and Chapter 3 of this study).

experience of another tradition." "Unless the theology of the partners in dialogue recognises this, unless they make some attempt at it, then dialogue will perhaps be an informative conversation, but it cannot become a transformative encounter."

The latter observation leads into Knitter's third main point. "Dialogue must be based on openness to the possibility of genuine change/conversion." He goes on to discuss a "passing over to other religions" which will require openness to change. He specifies the need for careful study of the language, symbols and imagery of other religious groups so that a sympathetic entry may be made. Here we are introduced to the complex question of language as the medium of personal encounter, both in terms of linguistics and of interpretation. We cannot be touched and changed by another unless we enter into his world of thought and imagery. Max Warren saw the labour of learning another language, culture and religion as the beginning, the making possible of personal encounter:

"This understanding (i.e. of language, culture etc.) is much more than an intellectual exercise. It has something in it of the nature of love. I want to 'feel what he feels' about the truths by which he lives. He does the same ... From this mutual experience a new relationship is created. Eventually this is the creative achievement of dialogue."<sup>40</sup>

One final observation apropos interfaith encounter is its

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40. Max Warren, I Believe in the Great Commission, p.163. (See also Kenneth Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.198-201 and p.203).

essentially tradition-oriented nature. While partners do not meet as "representatives", yet they meet as persons formed by their respective communities and traditions, and in this sense, they bring to dialogue, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, their group belongings of history, culture, worship and morality.<sup>41</sup> The result desired in religious terms is "a community of communities".<sup>42</sup>

"We expect a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and the place is called community. In the public catacombs of this expectation there is no single God's word which can be clearly known and advocated, but the words delivered are clarified for us, in our human situation of being turned to one another."<sup>43</sup>

Such then would seem to be the shape of personal encounter, and in particular of interfaith encounter. It is founded upon a personal epistemology which engages the whole person, it requires a personal commitment leading to change, and is essentially an encounter with the divine in the other.

In the following chapter, a case study of Christian-Muslim personal encounter is presented. It is a report on the first international Christian-Muslim conference at Chambésy in June 1976. The conclusions drawn from this study highlight not only the nature of personal encounter, its difficulties and

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41. See note 2 above.

42. P. Knitter, No Other Name? p.14.

43. M. Buber, Between Man and Man, p.7.

possibilities, but also the nature of Christian-Muslim encounter with its specific difficulties and potentiality.

## Chapter 2. Christian-Muslim personal encounter: a case study

"This conference on Christian Mission and Islamic Da<sup>C</sup>wah may well mark the first occasion in the history of Christian-Muslim relations of members of the two faiths meeting, albeit informally, to discuss an area of commitment which is fundamental to their respective faiths; for da<sup>C</sup>wah is to Islam as mission is to Christianity, ... The absolute commitment of the Christian to mission and of the Muslim to da<sup>C</sup>wah has undoubtedly been one of the principle contributory factors to the tension, and at times conflict, which has so extensively characterised the relationship between Christianity and Islam."

This statement is taken from David Kerr's editorial introduction to the report on the Chambésy conference. The conference was convened by David Kerr, Director of the Centre for the Study of Islam, and Christian-Muslim Relations at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, and Professor Khurshid Ahmad, Director General of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester. Six Muslim and six Christian spokesmen and leaders participated in the conference. They came from several different parts of the Muslim-Christian world: the Middle East, the USA, Indonesia, Rome, Pakistan, East Africa and the UK.

The purpose of the conference was "to try to contribute to the elimination of the religious passions which further inflame conflicts basically due, much of the time, to economic,

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1. David Kerr, Editorial, International Review of Mission, p.370.

ideological or political differences."<sup>2</sup>

"The groups tried to explain to each other their basic motivations, to understand and if possible to correct the caricatures they had of one another, and to see how damaging realities could be changed and a pattern of behaviour in mission and da'wah defined and commended. The encounter was an impassioned one, in which it was not easy to agree. At the same time, however, time and time again, we came back to the conference table with the conviction that ways could and should be found to create more fruitful situations for reciprocal witness."<sup>3</sup>

The initiative for the conference had come from the Christian side. This was due to a painful awareness among leading Christian missionaries to Muslims of "the burden of mistrust which besets the missionary relationship between Muslim and Christian."<sup>4</sup> Christian participants expressed "their gratitude to the Muslims for their acceptance to enter into this encounter, given the fact that each Muslim participant had had, in various ways, personal experiences of western Christian missionaries which had left him suspicious of Christian motives in mission and reluctant to engage in discussion with missionaries."<sup>5</sup>

However, the invitation having been accepted, both parties set themselves the task of entering into genuine personal encounter.

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2. Emilio Castro, Editorial, Ibid, p.365.
  3. Ibid., p.366.
  4. D. Kerr, Ibid. p.370.
  5. Ibid, p.370-371.

"... we did not enter the consultation with a view to scoring points on each other. We met with the objective of understanding each other's position more sympathetically, of identifying the areas of agreement and disagreement and of trying to build mutual trust so as to co-ordinate our response to threats and challenges that beset humanity today. Instead of merely talking about each other, we have tried to talk to each other, however haltingly. That is why we, instead of producing an impersonal collection of scholarly papers, have tried to collect around one table a few distinguished religious leaders of the two faiths and invite them to face each other as much as face the real issues that confront them."<sup>6</sup>

Here we have exemplified several elements of the conceptual framework for personal encounter suggested in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Firstly, there is the recognition of the need to be in relation, the need for I-Thou as opposed to I-It.<sup>7</sup> This implies a person-centred approach to the task, a refusal to be bound by objectifying categories of knowledge or past prejudices, but instead, a resolution to be open to the other as person in the present. There was also evidence at the start of the conference of the resolution to accept the involvement, commitment and responsibility inherent in personal encounter as an holistic experience.<sup>8</sup> Analysis of the proceedings of the conference do indicate, however, that these ideals of personal encounter were difficult to achieve.

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6. Khurshid Ahmad, *Ibid.* p.367.

7. See pp. 9-13 of this thesis.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

Firstly, and most significantly, the Muslim participants were unable to free themselves from the memories of past Christian colonial domination which had masqueraded as missionary endeavour. Muslim consultative papers, and ensuing discussions, were heavily weighted in this regard.

"If we look back to the period between World War I and World War II, we find that almost the entire Muslim world was under western influence, either directly as colonies or indirectly as protectorates or mandate countries ... This period will go down in history as a period of de-Islamization and secularization of the Muslim world."<sup>9</sup>

"Missionaries in India and African have been agents of secularization even if they did not realise it ... Through their vast educational programme, they introduced into the minds of the younger generations ideas which were bound to call the old religious order into question ... (they) intended and expected to replace the pagan society with a Christian one."<sup>10</sup> The particular example of Indonesia is quoted. "Ninety-five per cent of its population is Muslim ... The Christians have opposed every effort by the Muslims to make the sheri<sup>C</sup>ah the basis of Muslim corporate life in Indonesia."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, "Christians use every artifice to see that secular law prevails, which for the Muslims virtually means de-Islamization of their collective life. If this is

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9. Muhammed Rasjidi, International Review of Mission, p.427.

10. L. Newbiggin, Honest Religion for Secular Man, quoted by M. Rasjidi, *Ibid.* p.428.

11. M. Rasjidi, *Ibid.* p.435.

modernization, then we as Muslims look upon it as a form of neo-colonialism."<sup>12</sup>

A second example of past Christian domination offered by the conference was that of East Africa.

"Islam is the religion of a majority of the people of East Africa. But the Muslims are faced with a new form of slavery - arbitrary rule and political suffocation. And their new rulers are not colonialists from abroad but people belonging to the Christian minority group, people who are the products of the colonial era of the missions and who still enjoy their blessings. I wonder why one form of slavery was bad and why this new form of slavery is not considered obnoxious."<sup>13</sup>

The Muslim view of Christian mission in the past is summed up as follows: "The church is seen not as inviting people to the teachings of Jesus (peace and blessings of God be upon him), but trying to subvert or seduce Muslims from practising Islam."<sup>14</sup> Muslims see Christian diakonia in mission lands as a cloak for imperialism. "Taking advantage of Muslim ignorance, of Muslim need for educational, health, cultural and social services, of Muslim political stresses and crises, of their economic dependence, political division and general weakness and vulnerability, these missionary services have served purposes other than holy - proselytism, that is, adding members to the

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12. Ibid. pp. 437-438.

13. Ali Muhsin Barwani, Ibid., p.442.

14. A. Irfan, Ibid., p.444.

Christian community for reasons other than spiritual."<sup>15</sup>

K. Ahmad sums up the Muslim critique in four points:

- "... a) Gross and flagrant misrepresentation of the teachings of Islam and of the life and message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ...
- b) The methodology of Christian mission concentrated upon influencing the object in a state of weakness and helplessness ... approaches were made to those who were disadvantaged, exploiting their weaknesses for the sake of proselytism ... Many a Christian mission acted as an organic part of colonialism and cultural imperialism ...
- c) Whatever the ultimate aim, subversion of the faith and culture of Islam seems to have been the prime target of the Christian missionary enterprise ...
- d) Muslims were treated as political rivals ... Western Christendom's attitude towards the Palestinian problem in general and towards Jerusalem in particular, for example, agonizes Muslims."<sup>16</sup>

From the Christian side, it was pointed out that these abuses of mission, condemnable as they were, belonged nevertheless to a past colonial era, and not to present mission praxis. Could not the Muslims try to focus on the repentance and goodwill of Christian missionaries now? K. Ahmad responded:

"Permit me to say that there is some kind of understanding gap, and not merely a communication gap, between Christians and Muslims on this point. When a critique of colonialism is made, people in the West say they agree, but insist that colonialism is now dead. When criticisms are made of

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15. Statement of the Conference, *ibid.*, pp.458-459.

16. K. Ahmad, *ibid.*, p.368.

missions, people say this was true of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but no longer today. I may not necessarily be right, but if I understand the Muslim mind correctly, I must say that the Muslims feel that the names changed but that the substance has not. We are still dealing with the same realities in different garb. In the field of colonialism we have come to the much more dangerous area of concealed colonialism, neo-colonialism. Now it is very possible that our Muslim reaction is subjective, but you must realise that this is our reaction, and that it is a real and honest reaction. Even in the area of mission, the facts of exploitation and mission we are referring to relate to 1960's and '70's and not an earlier age."<sup>17</sup>

The struggle to accept the other in their present reality was common to both Christian and Muslim participants. The Muslims could not extricate themselves from the gross violations of the past, and the Christians could not understand the present outrage of Muslims who felt bound by the unjust domination of the Christian West. Muslim participants saw Christian participants, first and foremost, as representatives of domination, and only secondarily as sincere persons in their own right, as Christians seeking reconciliation and unity. Christian participants saw Muslims, first and foremost, as persons in their own right, but failed to recognise the paramount importance of group identity in the shaping of a Muslim person. Both groups, therefore, found difficulty within the encounter in being wholly open to the self-communication of the other.

As well as historical, and socio-cultural pre-suppositions hindering the encounter, there were also religious pre-

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17. Ibid., p.446.

suppositions at work. On the Christian side there was the centrality of Jesus Christ as Lord of creation through his death/resurrection: <sup>18</sup>

"For the apostolate to Islam it is quite clear that this is the crucial point. The Lordship of Jesus in the absolute sense is contested by Islam and thereby the very foundation and motive for Christian mission to Islam is questioned."<sup>19</sup>

Coupled with this is the Christian calling to bear witness to the revelation of Jesus as Son of God in power so that faith in him may be given to others.<sup>20</sup> Faithful witness implies a refusal to persuade by using either diakonia or rational argument:

"... the real Gospel is not development or progress, but the proclamation that He loved us first and that we only attain real life through faith in the crucified and risen Lord."<sup>21</sup>

"Faith is God's free gift of grace and not something which is the result of argument, persuasion or propaganda."<sup>22</sup>

A further fundamental aspect of the Christian position is the universal call to salvation through Jesus. "God was in Christ and became sin for our sake; his love compels us to preach the good news about salvation in him in order that he may be

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18. See Arne Rudvin, *ibid.*, pp. 376-378.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 377.

20. See *ibid.*, pp. 379-384.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

acknowledged as Lord and Saviour by every man ..."<sup>23</sup> For, "we recognise that empirical and practical man is in an awful mess, and men are in the same mess, and have been throughout history, but we deny - or we insist, we cry out - that this is not what man was created to be. Man is not a sinner of necessity, but by his own will."<sup>24</sup>

Finally, for the Christian, there is the sacrament of the biblical word as an important medium of revelation and salvation in Jesus. "The Gospel is something living, and though its proclamation has been recorded in the books of the New Testament, these are not themselves the Gospel. The Gospel is good news proclaimed to the Church, which the Church in turn proclaims, and semantically in Greek it excludes the meaning of a 'Book'."<sup>25</sup>

The significance of such pre-suppositions and convictions within interfaith encounter is considerable. Positively, they are the necessary foundation upon which authentic encounter can be built, but negatively, they can also prevent encounter taking place by hindering openness to change and to the truth manifest in the other.

The religious pre-suppositions evident in the Muslim

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23. Ibid., p. 378.

24. Ibid., p. 405.

25. Ibid., p. 387.

participants at Chambesy were as follows. Firstly, there was strong emphasis on the revelation of Islam as the true and definitive religion which satisfies mankind's quest for rational truth. "Islam puts its trust in man's rational power to discriminate between the true and the false. "Truth is now manifest from error. Whoever believes (i.e. accepts the truth) does so for his own good. Whoever does not believe (i.e. does not accept the truth) does so to his own peril." (39:41). Islamic da<sup>C</sup>wah is therefore an invitation to think, to debate and argue."<sup>26</sup> "That da<sup>C</sup>wah is rationally necessary is implied by the fact that in presenting its case, Islam presents it as natural or rational truth. "Rational" here means "critical"... Therefore, the stand of Islam is not an "act of faith", but one of "conviction". It is one of knowledge, of trust in the human power to know .. Islam is *din al-fitrah* (*religio naturalis*) which is already present in its fullness in man by nature ... The man who is not *homo religiosus*, and hence *homo Islamicus*, is not a man."<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the process of *dīn al-fitrah* therefore embraces all expressions of religious truth to be found among men. "The problem is to find out how far the religious traditions agree with *din al-fitrah*, the original and first religion ... and determine precisely how and when and where each has followed and fulfilled or transcended and deviated from, *din al-fitrah*."<sup>28</sup> The beliefs,

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26. Isma<sup>C</sup>īl Al-Farūqī, *ibid.*, pp. 392-393.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

scriptures and practices of other religions have to be examined in this light so that error can be recognised and separated out from truth.

Thirdly, there is divine guidance available to men in the call to truth; every people has had its prophets, the greatest being Muhammad, and through Muhammad has come the definitive guidance of "the Holy Quran for all men to read."<sup>29</sup>

Fourthly, acceptance of the truth of Islam leads to tawhīd, there is no god but God.<sup>30</sup> Tawhīd means that God preserves His transcendence above all that is not Him for He is sole Creator and Master, and that man is God's Khalīfah, or vicegerent on earth, called to actualise the divine will in creation.

"Islam holds man to be not in need of any salvation. Instead of assuming him to be religiously and ethically fallen, Islamic da'wah acclaims him as the Khalifah of Allah, perfect in form and endowed with all that is necessary to fulfil the divine will, indeed, even loaded with the grace of revelation! "Salvation" is hence not in the vocabulary of Islam."<sup>31</sup>

Man's dignity, his birthright is "as the maker of history, as the remoulder and refashioner of creation. Equally, his joys and pleasures are all his to enjoy, his life to live and his will to

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28. Ibid., p. 396.

29. Ibid., p. 397.

30. See *ibid.*, pp. 397-400.

31. Ibid., p. 399.

exercise, since the content of the divine will is not "not-of-this-world" but "of it".<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the acceptance of Islam means that the whole of life is brought into submission to the divine will. "Then Islam is not merely a religion in the limited sense of the word involving some metaphysical doctrines and some religious rites and rituals; it is a complete way of life and a code of socio-political behaviour."<sup>33</sup> Only this can explain "the Muslim yearning and effort to have an Islamic society and an Islamic state in the places in which they constitute the majority of the population and are in a position, therefore, to fashion their social and political life according to the values of Islam,"<sup>34</sup> i.e. according to the shari<sup>C</sup>ah, or the divine law.

Analysis of the report on this conference thus reveals various socio-cultural and religious dynamics at work which either facilitated or hindered the realisation of personal encounter. Facilitating the process was the desire on both sides to achieve a better mutual understanding. On the Christian side in particular was the desire for reconciliation and unity. Both sides strove truly to hear what the other was saying. Hindering encounter was the strength of group identity - we are Christians, you are

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32. Ibid., p. 399.

33. K. Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 448.

34. Ibid., p. 449.

Muslims and vice versa -, the effects of the past upon the present, i.e. the need either to justify hurt or to recompense wrong-doing, and the need to preserve and explain the orthodoxy of each one's religious stance.

When all this is applied to the stages of personal encounter outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis,<sup>35</sup> the results are as follows. Firstly, the encounter began as the dramatic enactment of a dualistic situation. Christians and Muslims entered upon the experience very conscious of being Christian or Muslim, and very conscious of the religious identity of "the others". In other words, each group of participants assumed a stance of autonomy. Initial presentation of consultative papers reflected not only this autonomy but also a monological situation. As the conference progressed, a second stage was entered upon, that of relatedness whereby the participants recognised the challenge the situation presented and began to draw upon their resources, moral, cultural, religious and spiritual in order to accept the challenge. By the end of the conference, a third and final stage of encounter had begun, tentatively, to emerge, that of relation: the sense of autonomy, in some measure, was being qualified as "the other" took on a personal instead of an objective form. "It" was turning into "Thou", an object was becoming a presence, a feeling of involvement, commitment and responsibility was slowly coming to birth. In some of the participants, particularly the Christians,

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35. See pp. 15-18 of this thesis.

there emerged a recognition of the need for a significant change of outlook. Whether an experience of transcendence was part of this third stage or not is difficult to ascertain. There is no evidence in the report of either side having a religious experience of "truth" and of "God" in and through the other. But certainly this final stage evidenced a desire that the measure of personal encounter achieved through the conference should assume a form for the future.

"What about the future? The Chambésy spirit and the concrete suggestions it frames represent a first step on a long and arduous road men of goodwill from Christianity and Islam will have to tread if they want to change Christian-Muslim relations for the better. The mini-consensus evolved at Chambesy deserves to be widened as well as deepened. It contains the seeds from which the tree of some universal consensus will grow.<sup>36</sup>

In the Conference statement,<sup>37</sup> several important conclusions were formulated in regard to Christian-Muslim relations for the future. Firstly, religious freedom must be safeguarded for the communities of both faiths. Secondly, Christian abuse of diakonia in the Muslim world must cease. "Such a radical measure is necessary to cleanse the atmosphere of Muslim-Christian relations and orientate them towards mutual recognition and co-operation worthy of the two great religions."<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, the paramount importance of personal encounter for future developments was

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36. K. Ahmad, International Review of Mission, p. 369.

37. Statement of the Conference, *ibid*, pp. 457-460.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

recognised.

"The conference is aware that good neighbourly and co-operative relations between Christians and Muslims cannot exist or endure unless there is a deep-anchored reciprocal understanding of theologies, histories, moral and legal doctrines, social and political theories and problems of acculturation and modernization faced by the two faiths. To this end the conference urges that the World Council of Churches, the Vatican and the international Islamic organizations sponsor conferences at which these themes will be examined and discussed at regular intervals."<sup>39</sup>

The following two chapters of this thesis attempt to analyse in detail the historico-cultural and religious pre-suppositions Muslims and Christians bring to any personal encounter. Such an analysis brings into clear focus the rôle of personal encounter in the development of Christian-Muslim relations. A proper mutual understanding cannot begin to emerge unless Christians and Muslims come face to face, and talk and listen to one another. Only then, perhaps, will the pre-judgements and ignorance of centuries be cleared away, and a new respect be born.

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39. Ibid., p. 459.

### **Chapter 3 Christian-Muslim personal encounter: the influence of historico-cultural pre-suppositions**

The purpose of the rest of this thesis is to examine the historico-cultural and religious pre-suppositions prior to and operative within present encounters between Christians and Muslims, to note their effects, negative and positive, and thence to assess the rôle of personal encounter in the future development of Christian-Muslim relations. For purposes of clarity, the pre-suppositions have been divided into historical, cultural, and religious, but the division is necessarily arbitrary, particularly in the case of Muslims. The holistic concept of life integral to Muslim faith means that the historical, cultural and religious cannot and should not be separated. Attempts therefore to structure Muslim pre-suppositions in this way have proved difficult and unwieldy. But the scheme was considered the most useful one to adopt for the purposes of the study.

Firstly then, there are historical pre-suppositions to be considered. It is platitudinous to point out that our relationships are affected by our past experiences, yet the significance of this point in regard to Christian-Muslim relations cannot be overestimated. The past of these relations is ever present to Muslims, and intrudes itself upon the conscience of Christians. As a negative dynamic within encounter, it must be

acknowledged fully, and worked at patiently, for it constitutes a real hinderance to the achievement of personal encounter. In the categories of Buber, the rancour of the past turns each partner into an It. "The I of the primary word I-It, that is, the I faced by no Thou, but surrounded by a multitude of "contents", has no present only the past".<sup>1</sup> And the ruling effect of the past is to block openness to the other as other, as presence and invitation.

Contemporary Western Islamic Christian scholarship is acutely aware of the adverse influence historical pre-suppositions exercise on Christian-Muslim encounters.

"Our attitudes towards one another as 20th century Christians and Muslims, and our image of ourselves in relation to the other, are profoundly marked by historical considerations of which most of us have little appreciation. Too often in our times the meeting of Christians and Muslims continues to take place in situations of mutual ignorance, suspicion and antagonism, and even of open conflict, and we are too often unwittingly guilty of perpetuating harmful caricatures and stereotyped images of one another, regardless of the Mosaic command: "You shall not give false evidence against your neighbour" (Exodus 20,16: New English Bible translation)."<sup>2</sup>

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1. M. Buber, I and Thou, p. 12.
  2. David Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours", Islamochristiani, p.2. Similarly Albert Hourani writes: "The two communities which profess the two religions have faced each other across the Mediterranean for more than a thousand years, with hostility, it is true, but with a look of uneasy recognition in their eyes - uneasy because neither knows quite what to make of the other." Western Attitudes Towards Islam, p.6. The same point is made by R. W. Southern: "The existence of Islam made the West profoundly uneasy. On the practical plane it caused permanent unease, not only because it was a danger but because the danger was unpredictable and immeasurable: the West had no access to the counsels and motives of Islam."

W. Montgomery Watt has summarised Christian historical pre-suppositions in terms of 'a distorted image' forged by medieval scholars and still operative today.

"Among the points which went to compose this 'distorted image' of Islam were the following: Islamic doctrine contained many false assertions and deliberate perversions of the truth; Islam was a religion of violence, spreading by the sword; it was a religion of self-indulgence, especially sexual; and since Muhammad, besides exhibiting moral weaknesses, was the author of a false religion, he must be a tool or agent of the devil. None of these points could be accepted by an objective historian today. The 'distorted image', however, has continued to influence the Western understanding of Islam into the present century, despite the efforts of scholars for two hundred years or more to correct the more flagrant distortions. Just as their efforts appeared to be successful certain events linked with the present revival of Islam are causing not a few Westerners to turn back to the 'distorted image'."<sup>3</sup>

In the following analysis of Christian historical pre-suppositions, the three elements of the 'distorted image' as proposed by Watt (viz. Islam as a religion of violence, corruption, and perversion of the truth) are used as a structural framework.<sup>4</sup>

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But this incalculable factor was only an indication of a deeper incomprehension of the nature of the thing itself." Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages, p.4.

3. W. Montgomery Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.4.
4. In an earlier study, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", Hamdard Islamicus pp. 12-16, Watt enlarges upon his term 'distorted image', systematically refuting its three constitutive elements. R. W. Southern's work (see note 2) offers a masterly summary treatment of the question, but for a fully comprehensive survey see Norman Daniel, Islam and the West: the Making of an Image.

The first element, Islam as a religion of violence, was generated in the Western Christian mind by two historical events: the initial conquests of Islam, and the Crusades. The former was undertaken by the first Muslim generation in the cause of jihād, or "holy war", but as Watt points out "the aims of such a war were political and economic, not religious ... In lands conquered by the Muslim armies it was normal for Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and even Hindus to accept the status of dhimmīs or 'protected minorities', which gave them internal autonomy under their religious leaders in return for the payment of moderate taxes."<sup>5</sup> "In the light of this fact some of the activities of the Inquisition in Spain make sad reading. All Christians should acknowledge with sorrow that some of their fellow Christians, doubtless from truly pious motives, attempted in the name of Christ to coerce non-Christians to abandon their own religion and to profess Christianity."<sup>6</sup>

The second event, the Crusades, left an even deeper imprint on the Western mind of Islam as a religion of violence. "The relationship between Christendom and Islam changed abruptly with the First Crusade."<sup>7</sup> The two civilizations had been engaged in

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5. W. M. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, p.14. The first full, honest and scholarly refutation of violence as integral to Islamic expansion was offered by Thomas Arnold, The Preaching of Islam.
  6. W. M. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, p.13.
  7. R. W. Southern, Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages,

conflict intermittently since the emergence of Islam in the 7th century AD, but the Crusades generated a religious dimension previously dormant in the Western popular image of Islam.

"As military expeditions the Crusades were roughly on a level with countless others, but they also had a religious aim. In justification of the Crusades it may be held that the primary aim was the positive one of making it possible for Christians to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land without molestation; but it should also be admitted that many other factors were involved. Perhaps the worst feature was the contradiction between the activity of crusading and the belief that Islam was a religion of the sword and Christianity one of gentleness."<sup>8</sup>

It was the religious aim, of vindicating the glory of Christ in the face of heathen blasphemy which turned the Crusaders into a catalyst of radical change for the history of Europe.

"The Crusades affected the system of Europe, not only by their influence on the Church and its general position, but also by affording a new bond of European unity. After 1096 we may say that the idea of a united Western Europe is expressed not merely in the formal scheme of a Holy Roman Empire, but also in the actual fact of a common Christian Crusade ... The idea of a European Commonwealth - a res publica Christiana engaged in the res Christiana of defence or offence against the Turk - survives through the centuries."<sup>9</sup>

The same insight is expressed autobiographically by a Western Jewish convert to Islam, Muhammad Asad. Reporting to a

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p. 27.

8. W. M. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, p.12.
9. Thomas Arnold, The Legacy of Islam, pp. 72-73.

friend the incredulity of Western diplomatic colleagues faced with the fact of his conversion, he writes: "To find a truly convincing explanation of this prejudice ... one has to look far backward into history and try to comprehend the psychological background of the earliest relations between the Western and the Muslim worlds. What Occidentals think and feel about Islam today is rooted in impressions that were born during the Crusades."<sup>10</sup>

The author then goes on to elaborate his point:

"The Crusades were the strongest collective impression on a civilization that had just begun to be conscious of itself. Historically speaking, they represented Europe's earliest - and entirely successful - attempt to view itself under the aspect of cultural unity ...in the Crusades, and through them, the religious bond was elevated to a new plane, a cause common to all Europeans alike - the politico-religious concept of 'Christendom', which in its turn gave birth to the cultural concept of 'Europe'."<sup>11</sup>

Given the traumatic nature of the Crusades it is hardly surprising that their effects still persist in the Christian mind today and become operative, even subconsciously, when Christians meet Muslims. "The damage caused by the Crusades was not restricted to a clash of arms: it was, first and foremost, an intellectual damage - the poisoning of the Western mind against the Muslim world through a deliberate misrepresentation of the teachings and ideals of Islam. For, if the call for a Crusade was to maintain its validity, the Prophet of the Muslims had, of

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10. Muhammad Asad, The Road to Mecca, p. 5.

11. Ibid., p. 6.

necessity, to be stamped as the Anti-Christ and his religion depicted in the most lurid terms as a fount of immorality and perversion ... The shadow of the Crusades hovers over the West to this day; and all its reactions to Islam and the Muslim world bear distinct traces of that die-hard ghost ...".<sup>12</sup>

In more specific terms, the Crusades effected a twofold change in the Christian attitude to Islam: the Muslim world was branded as both morally corrupt and religiously perverse. The medium of the change was the circulation throughout northern Europe of fictitious tales. "The picture of the Prophet and nature of Islam ... was pieced together in northern France, stimulated perhaps by the fireside stories of returning warriors and clerks far behind the line of battle; in schools and monasteries it was given a form congenial to Western minds. The result was a popular image of astonishing tenacity which outlived the rise and fall of many better systems."<sup>13</sup>

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12. Ibid., pp. 6-7. The same point in regard to the Crusades is made by Watt: "Another point which has to be acknowledged is the connection between the spiritual revival in Western Europe associated with the Crusades and the dissemination of the 'distorted image' of Islam." "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, pp. 12-13. See also Philip K. Hitti, Islam and the West: "In the Crusading period, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the anti-Moslem tradition fully crystallised and the Moslem image became deeply etched." p.52. Georges Khodr expresses the effects thus: "The Christian world, western and eastern, was the dwelling place of peace, light and knowledge. The non-Christian world was the dwelling place of war and darkness. This was a literal adoption of the Moslem distinction between Dar el Islam (the realm of Islam) and Dar el Kufr (the realm of the infidels)." "Christianity in a Dualistic World - the Economy of the Holy Spirit", in The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement, p.300.

The picture of Islam as a religion of moral corruption and licence, (the second element in the 'distorted image') had already begun to develop before the twelfth century. A Christian Arab, Al-Kindi, in attacking Islam, "turns the magnifying glass on the vulnerable points, displays Muhammad as a sexual self-indulgent murderer whose book was a collection of pretended revelations and whose religion spread by deceit, violence and the lure of lascivious practices."<sup>14</sup> But in the wake of the Crusades, such fictions became widespread. Southern explains the development:

"... we must notice that they (the fictions) were formed at a moment of great imaginative development in western Europe. The romances of Charlemagne and soon those of Arthur; the miracles of the Virgin; the wonders of Rome and the legends of Virgil; the legendary history of Britain - they are all products of approximately the same period and of precisely the same point of view as that which produced the legends of Mahomet and the fantastic descriptions of Moslem practices ... At the level of popular poetry, the picture of Mahomet and his Saracens changed very little from generation to generation. Like the well-loved characters of fiction, they were expected to display certain characteristics, and authors faithfully reproduced them for hundreds of years."<sup>15</sup>

"In that early French epic poem, La Chanson de Roland ... we find both swine and dogs eating Mahomet. The swine version became popular; it afforded a facile explanation of the Koranic

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13. R. W. Southern, Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages p. 28.
  14. P. K. Hitti, Islam and the West p. 50.
  15. R. W. Southern, Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages p. 29.

prohibition of eating pork."<sup>16</sup> Such fictions are born of ignorance, but they exert a remarkable influence on the formation of attitudes. Even into the 19th century, the effects are noticeable in the estimation accorded Islamic culture and religion by Western Christian scholarship. "To some extent perhaps this difficulty in seeing Islam clearly sprang from that uncertainty about its nature and status which Europe had always had. But it was also caused by simple ignorance, by the absence of that knowledge which could challenge the domination of ancient attitudes."<sup>17</sup> At the popular level, distorted ideas of Muslims still dominate the minds of most Western Christians, forming a real hindrance to personal encounter.

The third element in the 'distorted image', Islam as a perversion of the true revelation, has long been part of the furniture of the Western Christian mind. John of Damascus in the 8th century "pictured Islam as an idolatrous worship of a false prophet who worked out his doctrine from biblical sources under the tutelage of an Asian monk. Closely allied to this concept was that of Muhammad as a heresiarch. So strikingly similar to Christianity did primitive Islam seem to such early Christian scholars as John, and yet so radically different, as to justify its classification as a heresy. This was one of the earliest and most persistent Christian ideas of Islam."<sup>18</sup>

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16. P.K. Hitti, Islam and the West, p. 51.

17. A. Hourani, Western Attitudes towards Islam, p. 15.

The Venerable Bede, following in the same tradition of regarding Islam as a Christian heresy, in his biblical commentaries "explains that the Saracens were descendants of Hagar, the Egyptian wife of Abraham ... There was much in the known facts about their life to justify this identification. Ishmael had been driven into the desert: they came from the desert. Ishmael was a wild man whose hand was against everyman's: could any better description of the Saracens be found than this? Ishmael was outside the covenant: so were the Saracens."<sup>19</sup> The idea "helped to soften the harsh dichotomy between Christendom and those unpredictable enemies. It gave them a niche in Christian history."<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Islam remained an enigma for Christian theology, and is still so today. For the mediaevals, "... what was to be made of a doctrine that denied the divinity of Christ and the fact of his crucifixion, but acknowledged the virgin birth and his special privileges as a prophet of God, but gave sole authority to a volume which intermingled confusingly the teachings of both Testaments; that accepted the philosophically respectable doctrine of future rewards and punishments, but affronted philosophy by suggesting that sexual enjoyment would form the

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18. P. K. Hitti, Islam and the West, p. 50.
  19. R. W. Southern, Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages, pp. 16-17.
  20. *Ibid.*, p. 17. (In Chapter 4 of this study a 20th century treatment of this theme is studied.)

chief delight of Paradise?"<sup>21</sup> For the moderns, the enigma has become more subtle, (see below the religious pre-suppositions) but it persists and strongly influences dialogue. The mediaeval apocalyptic image of Muhammad as the Anti-Christ<sup>22</sup> has faded. Even the accusation of false prophethood<sup>23</sup> has been greatly modified. Yet shadows linger into the 20th century "when we can see the beginnings of a new questioning fed from many different sources. One of them was the sheer weight of knowledge about Islam and other religions gradually accumulated by scholars, missionaries, colonial officials and travellers. In the face of this knowledge, it was necessary to admit that there was more to study in Islam than had been thought; if it was to be condemned as falsehood it could only be in a more elaborate and complex way, and one which understood, evaluated and refuted rather than simply condemning."<sup>24</sup>

The Christian strategy of refuting the falsehood of Islam replaced armed conflict when the Crusades failed.<sup>25</sup> If the falsehood of Islam could not be destroyed by the sword, then it

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21. R. W. Southern, Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages, p. 6. For a similar summary treatment of the mediaeval problem see Albert Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History", in Middle Eastern Studies, p.208.
  22. See R. W. Southern, Western Images of Islam in the Middle Ages, pp. 22-26.
  23. See A. Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History", in Middle Eastern Studies, pp. 211-212.
  24. Ibid., p. 225.
  25. See P. Hitti, Islam and the West, p. 52.

must be brought into the light and redeemed.<sup>26</sup> Only in very recent years has there been a change in this Christian presupposition.<sup>27</sup>

The historical legacy of a 'distorted image' however is not confined to Christians within the encounter situation. Muslims too labour under a similar handicap in the image of Christians history has bequeathed to them. But it "should be noted that the Crusades had no comparable effect in the Islamic world."<sup>28</sup> Rather, the genesis of Islam's image goes back to Muhammad himself, to the Qur'an, and to the first generation of Muslims after the Prophet's death. At the beginning of Muhammad's ministry in Mecca, "the Muslims regarded the Christians as friends. The Qur'an (5.82) states:

"You (Muhammad) will indeed find that the most hostile of men towards the believers are the Jews and the idolaters, and you will indeed find that the most friendly of them to the believers are those who say 'We are Christians'; that is because among them are priests and monks, and they are not proud."<sup>29</sup>

However:

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26. See G. Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World", in The Ecumenical Movement in the Orthodox Church, pp. 300-301.
  27. See W. M. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, pp. 15-16 point (3).
  28. Ibid., p. 13. See however note 46 below.
  29. W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.1.

"It was probably after the conquest of Mecca (January 630) and more particularly after the expedition to Tabuk (October to December 630) that Muhammed realized that he would have to face military opposition from the Christian tribes towards the Syrian border - it is probable that many verses which at first only criticised Jews, were now revised to apply to both Christians and Jews."<sup>30</sup>

The doctrine of tahrif was a post-Quranic development:

"So far as the Qur'an itself is concerned, it does not appear to assert any general corruption of Jewish and Christian scriptures; after the conquests of Iraq, Syria and Egypt, however, the doctrine of tahrif or 'corruption' was elaborated in various ways to give the Muslim Arabs a defense against the better educated Christians with whom they were now mixing. From this period onwards Islam and Christianity have been rivals, and this has made it natural to suppose that the criticism of Christian doctrines in the Qur'an have a hostile, that is, anti-Christian, intention."<sup>31</sup>

The actual content of Islam's 'distorted image' - that Christians violate the unity of God, that they are half-hearted in their lived commitment, that they are proud and deceiving - will be examined in the sections on cultural and religious pre-suppositions. At this point, the study simply locates the historical origin of the image. Its effects on dialogue with Christians will become evident as the study progresses.

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30. W. M. Watt, "The Christianity Criticised in the Qur'an." in The Muslim World, pp. 197-198. See also W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, pp. 1-2, and A. Hourani, Western Attitudes Towards Islam, pp. 6-7 where he treats of Muhammad's rejection by Christians and writes: "This sense of shock, this feeling, one might call it, of being rejected by one's own family, has always been there."

31. Ibid., p. 198.

There are two further points to be noted in regard to Muslim historical pre-suppositions. The first is that Muslims have a strong sense of their own history. "In the inner life of the contemporary Muslim is a deep sense of the Islamic past, sometimes nostalgic, but always a factor in the current scene. "The past in the present" might well be the theme-title of an analysis of Islam today, and the issues it faces ... The Muslim is keenly conscious both of the glories and the twilights of that history, though he is not always of one mind in identifying them ..."<sup>32</sup> "In this long perspective of Islamic history, it is wise to seek in much of Muslim thought and action in our time the urge under God to rectify the past, to put history in harmony again with Islamic destiny, to recover the success and the leadership proper in the household of Islam. In so far as that urge prospers in its purpose, so much the more are assurance and confidence restored to Islam."<sup>33</sup>

The foregoing observations are well illustrated from the following writings of a contemporary Muslim historian:-

"The two failures of the Arabs, the one before Constantinople and the other in France, retarded the progress of the world for ages and put back the hour-hand of time for centuries ... The Renaissance, civilization, the growth of intellectual liberty, would have been accelerated by seven hundred years ... (The author goes on to enumerate

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32. Kenneth Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, pp. 203-204.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

the religious atrocities of mediaeval Europe) ... Above all, Spain, at one time the favoured haunt of learning and the arts, would not have become the intellectual desert it now is, bereft of the glories of centuries."<sup>34</sup>

The 20th century Islamic urge to recover the glories of the past will be dealt with in more detail under cultural pre-suppositions.

A second point in regard to Muslim historical pre-suppositions is that human history is the history of the emergence and triumph of the ummah, divinely decreed and guided. Therefore, past and present failure is "a painful problem."<sup>35</sup> "For the Muslim of the nineteenth century it was an old tutor bettered, indeed humiliated, by an early pupil."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Christian colonial expansion of Western Europe has had incalculable effects on the Muslim world and the Muslim mind. Just how searing these effects are will become evident as this study of personal encounter develops. In the Muslim mind, "Christian" has come to be identified with "Western", and "the Christian mission" with "imperialism". David Kerr came to the following conclusion after

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34. Amir 'Ali, "Islam and Christianity in History", in Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968, ed. A. Ahmad p. 109. In regard to the Muslim conquest of Spain, it is interesting to note the completely opposite opinion of a contemporary Spanish historian in Arnold, The Legacy of Islam, p.2.
35. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p. 204.
36. Ibid., p. 205-206. "But for the colonial interregnum and the psychological hiatus it created, the story of contemporary Islam may very well have been radically different." Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: Challenges and Opportunities", in Islam: Past Influences and Present Challenges, ed. A. Welch, p.321.

the international conference on Christian mission and Islamic  
Da'wah at Chambésy in 1976:

"The experience of this conference has left me convinced that however well-intentioned and well-informed Christians may be about Islam, rarely are they sufficiently sensitive to the depth and implications of the Muslim sense of injury at the hands of the Christian missionary."<sup>37</sup>

To summarise:<sup>38</sup> Christian historical pre-suppositions evident in personal encounter with Muslims comprise a legacy of a 'distorted image' whereby "Christian writers over the centuries have indulged in a "character assassination" ... " of Muhammad and have created "the popular conception that it (Islam) was a religion without ethical or spiritual value ... "a religion of violence" ... (and) a backward religion..."<sup>39</sup>

"These negative stereotypes of Islam ... have permeated European cultural and political attitudes towards Islam, at popular and intellectual levels. Tragically they continue to provide the picture of Islam in the minds of most Europeans who are not themselves Muslim, and we are driven to the conclusion that most non-Muslim Europeans are essentially mediaeval in their attitudes to Islam. This judgement cannot exclude the majority of Christians..."<sup>40</sup>

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37. D. Kerr, "Editorial", International Review of Mission, p.370.

38. The form of this summary is taken from D. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours", in Islamochristiani, pp. 7-19.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

However, Christian history has produced figures who evidenced a more positive, more personal attitude towards Islam. "Most of these figures were scorned in their day by the prevalent mood of resentment of Muslims, and consequently they failed to have a marked impact on the development of popular Christian attitudes towards Islam. However ... they remind us that a more creative Christian approach to Muslims ... has a place in European history which has never been entirely strangled by the more aggressively polemical tradition."<sup>41</sup>

A polemical tradition is the outcome of pre-suppositions rooted in a feeling of threat. "Mediaeval Islam scarcely saw Christianity as a threat, whereas the Latin Church felt deeply threatened by Islam, as did the churches of the East."<sup>42</sup> After the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, the feeling of threat passed to Islam. "The Muslim world felt under not merely the threat but the reality of European control, and it was now the turn of Muslim polemicists."<sup>43</sup> "It is to be expected, therefore, that Muslim writers, in defending their own religion (apologetics) should have done so by attempting to refute Christianity (polemics), often in a style which was as aggressive and as much founded upon distorted views of Christianity as had been the polemical Christian tradition in respect of Islam."<sup>44</sup> The net

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41. Ibid., p. 10.

42. Ibid., p. 6.

43. Ibid., p. 7.

result has been a hardening of Islam's 'distorted image'. Christians are arrogant perverters of the truth of God, and their mission in the world nothing but a "subversive aspect of Western imperialism."<sup>45</sup> which goes back to the Crusades.

"The Crusades left a trail of bitterness across relations between Christians and Muslims that remains a living factor in the world situation of the present day. To Muslims the West is the great aggressor. Nearly nine hundred years ago it deliberately entered into that role in the name of Christ, and today it finds it extremely difficult to change the image of itself that remains in the Muslim world ... To Westerners it may appear that the Crusades happened a long time ago ... The East has a different time scale; to every Muslim in the Mediterranean lands the Crusades are an event of yesterday, and the wounds are ready at any moment to break out afresh."<sup>46</sup>

The final word of summary belongs again to David Kerr, based as it is upon frequent experience of personal encounter with Muslims:

"What is the relevance of this lengthy summary of Western Christian attitudes to Islam ... ? Quite simply that, as western Christians, we are inextricably part of this history, and though we may be unfamiliar with it, it will have had a formative influence through our cultural environment on the way in which we look upon Islam. For this reason it is part of our existential encounter with Muslims, and it cannot be ignored."<sup>47</sup>

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44. Ibid., p. 15.

45. Ibid., p. 17.

46. S. Neill, The History of Christian Mission, quoted in D. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours", in Islamochristiana, p.17.

47. D. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours", in Islamochristiani, p.10.

It remains then, to examine these historical pre-suppositions in the light of the principles worked out in Chapter 1. The correlation makes sad reading. Christians and Muslims who enter upon encounter constrained by the kinds of pre-suppositions outlined above will turn the other into an It, and thereby exclude the possibility of a response, an engagement and a gift of the whole self.<sup>48</sup> Commitment in love too, and the experience of transcendence are excluded.<sup>49</sup> There is no modifying of autonomy, the interchange is hedged round with conditions, and there is no openness to change.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, a fortiori, there can be no interfaith encounter characterised by absolute openness to God, to the other's truth, and to his religious experience and tradition.<sup>51</sup> Distorted images and mutual recriminations form impenetrable barriers between man and man, and man and God. But happily, as Chapter 4 of this study will show, the possibility of breaking through such barriers has been tried and effected in the present century.

Historical pre-suppositions are ineluctably linked with cultural. It is somewhat arbitrary, therefore, to try to separate them. What is attempted in the following section is an analysis

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48. See pp. 12-14 of this study.

49. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

50. Ibid., pp. 15-18, the framework of personal encounter.

51. Ibid., pp. 19-21, interfaith encounter.

of those contemporary cultural pre-suppositions which surface in meetings between Christians and Muslims and which influence the development of personal encounter. But historical dimensions have to be incorporated since these are the foundations upon which cultural pre-suppositions rest.

Lesslie Newbigin identifies the 18th century Enlightenment period as the point from which to begin an understanding of Western European culture.

"Developments which had been going on continuously for several centuries seemed to have reached a point of clarification such that people could only use the word "enlightenment" to describe what had happened. Light had dawned. Darkness had passed away. What had been obscure was now clear. Things would henceforth be seen as they really are ... and this moment provides a proper point from which to begin an understanding of our culture."<sup>52</sup>

Ernst Cassirer's work<sup>53</sup> affords the most useful overview of the Enlightenment period. He seeks to demonstrate how the dynamics of the Enlightenment are to be traced "less in certain individual doctrines than in the form and manner of intellectual activity in general."<sup>54</sup> The impulse for this new activity lay in a radical turn of procedure to the "logic of facts", a reversal

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52. L. Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.7. This small work was commissioned by the British Council of Churches as a discussion document on the Church's mission in a pluralist society.

53. Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment.

54. *Ibid.*, p.ix.

which gave birth to "the modern analytical spirit."<sup>55</sup> It could be suggested, however, that what Cassirer saw as a turning away from the Cartesian method of deduction from metaphysical first principles was rather the second stage of a Platonic reversal initiated at the Renaissance and brought to articulation by Descartes. In other words, Descartes gave systematic intellectual form to an impulse experienced at the Renaissance to centralise human understanding in the mind. From this fundamental standpoint, it was an inevitable step forward - once the world of nature began to be explained by science instead of by Christian theology - to embark upon a mastery of the material world by means of the human mind. Western man has "lived from his head" so to speak ever since.<sup>56</sup> The exercise of reason was enthroned as a god, if not in the place of God, and the phenomenological world became man's empire for him to re-fashion. "In place of "dogmatic" or "unscientific" explanations which no longer satisfied the mind, the "true explanation" of things was now coming to light."<sup>57</sup> And so the march of a rational mastery of the

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55. Ibid, p.9.

56. See W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today. In Chapter 2, Watt develops an argument for "a common-sense view of reality" as opposed to an analytical, cerebral view: "... reality is the sphere in which a person acts and in which his acts have consequence". p.14. "Even Descartes, engaging in his intellectual experiment, could not but continue his daily life on the basis of the common-sense view". p.32. "Since philosophy and science thus pre-suppose the general reliability of the common-sense view of reality ... it follows that Descartes was mistaken in thinking that cogito ergo sum is our only certainty." p.33.

57. L. Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.8.

created order was carried into all spheres of life, learning and society.

What emerged was an "ultimate framework of axioms and assumptions by means of which Western man "makes sense of things"."<sup>58</sup> One may itemise these axioms and assumptions as follows: axioms - the autonomy of reason in science, faith and conscience; the autonomy, therefore, of the individual; and the sufficiency of collective man to attain wellbeing and goodness: assumptions - that the cerebral is the focus of the generation of knowledge, meaning and creativity; that man is inherently rightly-ordered; that the created order has a quasi-infinity; and that the non-phenomenological, the non-verifiable is unsubstantial and therefore inconsequential. Without a clear awareness of these axioms and assumptions, Western Christians cannot hope to engage in fruitful dialogue with non-Western Muslims.<sup>59</sup>

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, Western Christian cultural pre-suppositions can be viewed from four

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58. Ibid., p.10.

59. W. M. Watt considers this point so weighty that he devotes a lengthy chapter (see Chapter 2) in Islam and Christianity Today to the uncovering of the pre-suppositions inherent in Western scientism. "While it is taken as axiomatic in this book that the assured results of science are to be accepted, these assured results have to be carefully distinguished from a body of assumptions sometimes called 'scientism' ..." p.31. These assumptions have profound effects on interchange with Muslims whose view of reality is essentially religious, not scientific:- "A religious dogmatic system or symbolic structure is also a view of reality." p.8.

perspectives: self-sufficiency, autonomy, rationality and verifiability. Self-sufficiency as a dynamic within personal encounter has been noted.<sup>60</sup> It has various facets in relation to Christian-Muslim encounter, facets operative at a subconscious level, even in "good" Christians. The most influential of these has been termed "ethnocentricity", a sense of self-sufficient superiority vis-à-vis Easterners. "Following in the footsteps of the Greeks and Romans, the Occidental likes to think that all ... 'other' civilizations are or were only so many stumbling experiments on the path of progress so unerringly pursued by the West ... no more than consecutive chapters in the one and same book, of which Western civilization is, of course, the final chapter."<sup>61</sup> Ethnocentricity thus produces racialism. Essentially, racialism says: "We don't need you; you have no value." "Racialism is hardly to be found among Muslims, but it is frequent in the Christian and post-Christian societies of the modern West."<sup>62</sup> For racialism has had its effect on Christian faith. "The entire history of Western painting bears witness to the deliberate whitening or bleaching effect that changed Christ from a Semitic to an Aryan person."<sup>63</sup>

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60. See pp.10-13 of this study.

61. M. Asad, The Road to Mecca, p.3. John Hick describes this attitude of superiority as "a sort of mental spectacles which they (Britons) do not themselves see but through which they are seeing coloured people, namely the assumption that white people are inherently superior to black and brown people." God has Many Names, p.19.

62. W. M. Watt "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, p.13.

As well as a sense of self-sufficient superiority, ethnocentricity has produced also a sense of absolute autonomy, a sense of being born to mastery vis-à-vis non-Westerners. This facet developed in relation to territorial expansion. For example, British colonialism has effectively conditioned the Briton to believe that he is by nature a higher, nobler breed of human ... (and) ... served to prevent anything but minimal contact with the subject peoples governed ... "64 This point is made cogently by Dr Nico Smith from Pretoria. A white South African himself, he has come to realise that white South Africans view blacks as "functionaries". This raises the whole question of the identity of Western man, claims Dr Smith. "I have studied the self-concept of the early Christians for the first three hundred years and found it to be that of "servants". Western men over the centuries have become "rulers". Are we aware of the theological problem of our Western self-concept of rulers in regard to all non-Westerners?"65 A sense of having to master has produced in the modern Westerner a neo-colonialism. Originally, colonial domination through education and technology engendered a feeling of inferiority in coloured races. "Regularly looked down upon by his white masters, he (the coloured person) was conditioned to

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63. Roger Bastide, "Color, Racism and Christianity", Colour and Race, ed. John H. Franklin, p.37.
64. E. R. Braithwaite, "The "Coloured Immigrant" in Britain", ibid, p.218.
65. The point was made during a seminar conducted at Durham University in December 1984.

perceive them as his betters."<sup>66</sup> The British colonies are no more, but the coloured immigrant "is a constant reminder to Britons of his earliest relationship with them - slave to owner, subject to sovereign, conquered to conqueror, and man to master."<sup>67</sup> This neo-colonialism, both at home and abroad, causes a festering sore in the heart of the Muslim world.<sup>68</sup> It is an aspect of Western autonomy which must be relinquished if real personal encounter is to develop between Christians and Muslims.

Absolute autonomy as an element in the complex of Western cultural pre-suppositions also manifests itself as an absolute belief in the power of scientific and technological progress. When applied to Islam, the idea arose, and was strengthened in and through colonialism, that Muslim religion was a barrier to progress.

"The idea that Islam is a barrier against progress, a faith which obstructs the growth of certain virtues necessary for individuals or peoples who want to live in the modern world, is still put forward from time to time ... in Lord Cromer's Modern Egypt, ... it (Islam) is a 'noble monotheism', but as a social system it 'has been a complete failure': Islam

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66. John Hick, God Has Many Names, p.20.
67. E. R. Braithwaite, "The "Coloured Immigrant" in Britain", in Colour and Race, ed. J. H. Franklin, p.218.
68. D. Kerr writes in regard to our post-colonial age of "neo-colonialism" - "So easily we identify Islam as a "problem" for Christians, but are we prepared and able to see that the problem has as much to do with ourselves ... as it has to do with Muslims who will not quickly change their attitudes to Christianity, in the light of recent history?" "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours", in Islamochristiani, p.17.

keeps women in a position of inferiority; it 'crystallises religion and law into an inseparable and immutable whole, with the result that all elasticity is taken out of the social system'; it permits slavery; its general tendency is towards intolerance of other faiths; it does not encourage the development of the power of logical thought. Thus Muslims can scarcely hope to rule themselves or reform their societies..."<sup>69</sup>

In the popular Western Christian mind, Muslims are still pictured as "backward". The distortion affects dialogue at all levels.

The third element, rationality or objectivity, is one of the most significant outcomes of the Enlightenment and is deeply ingrained in Western culture. Its development has caused the West to devalue Islam. The Enlightenment saw Islam as philosophically and scientifically inconsequential.<sup>70</sup> "Philosophers of history or universal historians tried to distinguish various cultures or civilizations to define the essence of each, and to trace the process of transmission from one to another ... Such systems had to be universal, and therefore had to give some account of Islam. With some exceptions, Islam was not given a high place in them."<sup>71</sup>

W. M. Watt's threefold summary of Western rationalism is

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69. A Hourani, Western Attitudes Towards Islam, pp.13-14. Lord Cromer's second volume was published in 1908. The present Muslim world claims vigorously to have effected necessary social reforms.
70. See Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin, p.7.
71. A. Hourani, Western Attitudes Towards Islam, p.15.

useful, namely:-

"...(1) that the objects studied by the sciences are the sole reality; (2) that the account of the original form of a thing shows what it really is; and (3) that analysis of a thing into parts shows what it really is."<sup>72</sup>

The first of these points is illustrated in the 19th century development of the science of religions in which the focus is wholly on the phenomenological, or, in the categories of W. Cantwell Smith, "the cumulative tradition."

"The cumulative tradition ... lies wholly within this mundane world and is fully open to historical observation. Yet this is very different from saying that the whole history and nature of a religion lies within this sphere, so that a religion may be equated with its mundane observable career."<sup>73</sup>

The result of such objectifying has been the tendency to see the world's religions as sociological phenomena first and foremost. "Islam was seen not only as a religion but also as a civilization in which religious belief was only one (and perhaps not the basic) element; and the problem to resolve was not whether the beliefs of Islam were true or false but what was the nature of this civilization, what distinguished it from others."<sup>74</sup> And so a

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72. W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.31.

73. W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p.161.

74. A. Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History," in Middle Eastern Studies, p.245. At a later point in this

further development was the desire to identify the "essence" of a religion, or of religion in general, so that this insight could be used as a foundation for systematising and synthesizing the religions.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith observes that for the first one thousand years AD it was "faith" rather than "religion" which held the field.<sup>75</sup> The Renaissance and Reformation began to set the scene for the concept of "a religion", but it was the age of Enlightenment which brought it to birth.

"In pamphlet after pamphlet, treatise after treatise, decade after decade, the notion was (now) driven home that a religion is something one believes or does not believe, something whose propositions are true or not true, something whose locus is in the realm of the intellectual, is up for inspection before the speculative mind. This interpretation had by the mid eighteenth century sunk deep into the European consciousness. A legacy of it is the tendency still today to ask, in explanation of "the religion" of a people, what do they believe? - as though this were a basic, even the basic, question."<sup>76</sup>

Hasan Askari, from the Muslim side, points out that in the "language" of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Muslim "language" is that

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study, Hourani observes: "Watt's Islam and the Integration of Society, for all its insight, is perhaps too much affected by an older type of 'generalising' sociology: the rise of Islam is seen as an example of a process which may occur, in some form, whenever certain conditions exist." p.263.

75. W. C. Smith The Meaning and End of Religion, pp.31-32.

76. Ibid., p.40.

of "faith", while Christian "language" tends to be, that of "creeds". Such meanings are conditioned by historical patterns.<sup>77</sup>

This conditioning among some Christian scholars has led to a rational philosophical "monolithism" in regard to world religions which would seem to be characterised by a tendency towards reductionism and relativism. Arnold Toynbee proposes that we "distinguish our religion from our civilization" and "try to purge our Christianity of the traditional Christian belief that Christianity is unique", and thereby purge ourselves "of the exclusive-mindedness and intolerance that follows from a belief in Christianity's uniqueness."<sup>78</sup> W. E. Hocking finds it saddening that "the diversities of language, of symbol, of observance ... these barriers of expression, all but banished in the scientific unity of mankind, should still hold kindred spirits apart in the field of religion."<sup>79</sup> He goes on to note that "Christianity was necessarily dogmatic - it could only say Ecce Homo, Behold the Man; and it was committed to a certain intolerance, beneficent in purpose - in the interest of the soul it could allow no substitute for Christ."<sup>80</sup> He concludes that "our complex theologies ... are too little Christian, too much the artefacts of Western brains."<sup>81</sup>

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77. See note 73 of this chapter.

78. Arnold Toynbee, Christianity Among the Religions of the World, pp.95-96.

79. W. E. Hocking, Re-Thinking Mission, p.32.

80. Ibid., p.36.

81. Ibid., p.50.

A similar evaluation of Western Christian theological tradition is offered by John Hick in his monolithic vision of a new world faith. He writes:

"Once we understand that theology is the human attempt to state the meaning of revelatory events experienced in faith, we realise that many different Christian theologies are possible ... The theology that has actually developed, and has acquired a classic or orthodox status, is an aspect of the interreaction between the Christ-event and the history of man in the Western world during the last two thousand year."<sup>82</sup>

Hick calls for a Copernican revolution in theology which will place at the centre of the universe of faiths an "ultimate divine reality" which "is infinite and as such transcends the grasp of the human mind".<sup>83</sup> Then it becomes possible to see the different encounters with the transcendent within the various religious traditions as encounters with the one infinite reality.<sup>84</sup>

The need to be aware, and wary of, Western cultural idealism in the Christian approach to other faiths is becoming evident to Christian thinkers. Cultural relativism has become part of our historical culture. "As recent work in the sociology of knowledge has emphasised, our ways of perceiving the world are profoundly affected by the concepts with which we select, group, and organise

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82. John Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths, p.117.

83. Ibid., p.139.

84. See Ibid., p.141.

the multiplicity of events, assisting us to discern a coherent meaning which our language can express. And Cantwell Smith points out ... that the grid through which man's religious life is customarily seen today does not represent the only, or in his estimate the most fruitful way of perceiving this area of reality..<sup>85</sup>

"The new awareness of multiplicity, of pluralism, is being felt not just as a provisional situation or a stop-gap admission that we have to tolerate until we can come up with a master plan that will herd all these other "sheep" into one corral. Pluralism does not result simply from the limitations of the human mind to "get it all together". Rather, pluralism seems to be of the very stuff of reality, the way things are, the way they function. Without multiplicity, without the many others, our world - from atoms to molecules to plants to bugs to humans - would not be able to function and exist. Reality is essentially pluriform: complex, rich, intricate, mysterious ... There can never be just one of anything. We sense this today. And this is why we are wary of any person or movement that presents itself as the one and only, or the final word. The one-way road is most likely the road to destruction. Perhaps this is the abiding meaning of the story of the Tower of Babel; the Lord God warned against the havoc inherent in all dreams or projects for a monolithic, one-way vision of reality."<sup>86</sup>

The monolithic idealism of the West which searches for a

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85. John Hick, foreword to W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p.ix.
86. P. Knitter, p.6. This interpretation of the Tower of Babel myth is expounded by Raimundo Panikkar in "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel - A Meditation on Non-Violence" where he interprets the biblical myth as an abortive attempt at totalitarianism from which God delivers the human race. See also Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion: "There is no a priori reason for holding that the unique may not be more significant, more true, than the common."p.3.

common religious essence has distinct pitfalls. "Every time we attempt to talk about the essence of our own religion or of all religions, we are doing so through the concepts, mythic structures, and especially the social needs of our culture. To think we are stating the heart of our religion in its pure essence, without any cultural accretions, is to fool ourselves. All too often, we thereby fall into the trap of idolatry or ideology; instead of communicating what we think is the undiluted core of religion, we are passing on our own pet notions or cultural prejudices. Every experience and statement of the common essence of religions is bound up with some non-essentials."<sup>87</sup> Smith maintains that the worst trap - and we have fallen into it - is the reification of faith into self-contained entities called "religions".

"... a Christian can come to an adequate understanding of his faith, or a Muslim of his, and indeed, either of them to an understanding of each others, only if he extricate himself from a concern as to the essence or nature of Christianity, or Islam, only if he shift his attention away from such questions as "What is true Christianity?" ... Neither religion in general, nor any one of the religions ... is in itself an intelligible entity, a valid object of enquiry or of concern either for the scholar or for the man of faith."<sup>88</sup>

Two important cautionary points emerge from this new awareness of reification when applied to Christian-Muslim encounters. The first point is elaborated by A. Hourani:

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87. P. Knitter, No Other Name?, p.52.

88. W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p.12.

"The conclusion is clear: there is no such thing as 'Islamic society', there are societies partly moulded by Islam, but formed also by their position in the physical world, their inherited language and culture, their economic possibilities and the accidents of their political history. Before Islam was they existed, and if Islam has shaped them, they also have shaped it each in a different way. This does not of course mean that we must give up the idea that there is something called 'Islam', but simply that we must use it with caution and in its proper sphere. When we have made all the careful distinctions we must make, and recognised that as social beings Muslims act like other men caught in a web of traditions and present needs, there still remains - Islam, a statement about what God is and how He acts in the world, embodied in a book which Muslims believe to be the word of God, and articulated in a system of law and worship by which millions of men and women have lived for many centuries."<sup>89</sup>

Thus:

"It is the engage participant involved in the sustained endeavour to understand his own tradition (in my case, the Christian) and the serious student, involved in a sustained endeavour to understand one or more traditions other than his own (in my case, primarily the Islamic), that find themselves increasingly forced by the data before them to modify the presuppositions on which their basic questions were originally framed."<sup>90</sup>

A second point vis-à-vis Muslims in regard to the reification of faith into 'religion' is the cleavage between the sacred and the secular which results. There emerges a religious world, and a non-religious world. While this divide presents a problem of integration for the Christian West, it also presents a problem in Muslim-Christian encounter. Muslim motivation towards

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89. A. Hourani, Western Attitudes towards Islam, p.16.

90. W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, pp.13-14.

encounter can often take the shape of seeking a pact with Christians in the spirit of jihād, whereby the forces of secularism are to be routed. There is a war to be waged against 'non-religion'. Christians cannot enter into such a pact. "Dialogue which is based on the assumption that Christianity must at all costs choose the side of religion against the non-religious powers cannot be defended either on theological or practical grounds."<sup>91</sup> For the Christian, God is at work in the whole world, often in totally unexpected ways.<sup>92</sup>

It is for reasons such as these that Western Christian scholarship in world religions has experienced a movement away from rational analysis to a person-centred epistemology which is more concerned with personal faith than with religious systems.<sup>93</sup> The genesis of the movement is a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of a scientific world view. In regard to Islam, the limitations become particularly obvious when Western rationalism is applied to the Qur'ān and the birth of

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91. William Visser t'Hooft, Has the Ecumenical Movement a Future?, p.64.
92. This is Newbigin's stance in response to Toynbee's rallying cry for the "higher" religions to unite against the idolatrous forces of the "lower" religions - the worship of nature, and of man. He asserts: Christianity "is not an ideology. Above all, it is not an anti-communist or anti-fascist or anti-totalitarian ideology ... Basing its faith not on its own ideas but on God's acts, it will be prepared to recognise that even in secularist anti-religious movements the living God may be at work, both to build and to destroy." A Faith For This One World?, pp.45-46.
93. The work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith is of particular note in this regard.

Islam. Recording the Western philosophical urge to uncover the original form of a thing as the form of its reality,<sup>94</sup> A. Hourani notes how this first came to be applied to Christianity, and then to the other religions, particularly Islam.

"The methods elaborated, and the conclusions to which they led, could be applied to other prophetic leaders, sacred books and religious communities. In regard to each of the historical religions of mankind it would be possible to ask the same kind of question. How were the texts of its sacred books established? How far did they record a historical process and how far themselves create a story? What was the human reality of the person of the founder, behind the 'myth' created by the sacred book or the accumulation of tradition? In what ways and under what human impulses did doctrines and institutions develop from the time of the founder? Behind all these there lay another question; which perhaps could not be answered but which had to be asked: what was there of divine, what of human, in this religion? How far did it throw light on the human ways in which religious beliefs and human institutions develop, or on the way in which divine providence works?"<sup>95</sup>

Clearly, the process of reification can be seen at work. "It falsely confounds two underlying realities: on the one hand, the vitality of personal faith; on the other, the cumulative tradition of the different human cultures in which men have embodied their faith through history."<sup>96</sup>

Just how false rational comparisons turn out to be is

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94. See note 74 of this chapter.

95. A. Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History", in Middle Eastern Studies, p.238.

96. Ibid., p.243. Hourani is using Smith's categories as developed in The Meaning and End of Religion.

illustrated by Smith:

"Preliminary observations in comparing Christianity and Islam have been that for scripture the one has the bible, the other the Qur'an; for founder the one has Jesus Christ, the other Muhammed; the one has churches, the other mosques; and so on. Such comparisons seem obvious; and yet on closer inquiry the parallels are revealed as not so close, and may indeed prove at best metaphorical and finally even misleading."<sup>97</sup>

Smith goes on to offer what he believes are more true parallels, but in so doing opts to remain within the same rationale, thereby exemplifying the difficulties inherent in shedding one's "cultural skin". He proposes "... that the Qur'ān is to Islam as the person of Jesus Christ is to Christianity. Further parallels that (he) would construct in this series are between Muhammed and St Paul ... and between the Hadith and the Bible."<sup>98</sup> Smith, nevertheless, has been one of the earliest pioneers to have disavowed the approach of the Western science of religions. He would agree fully with the following contribution from Stephen Neil:

"Comparison can only be of ideas ... In order to make comparison possible, we have detached certain ideas or theories or doctrines from the living experience which has given rise to them. In doing so we rob them of their life ... The only method which produces results is that of self-exposure, as complete as possible, to the impact of a religion as a whole. The attitude is not that of theoria, the dispassionate contemplation which was the idea of the Greek, and which leads to nothing more fruitful than intellectual analysis. The new approach is that of engagement, of personal involvement in that which is of deep

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97. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, On Understanding Islam, p.237.

98. Ibid., p.239.

concern to us because it is of deep concern for millions of our fellow human beings."<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps the 20th century pioneer of engage between Christians and Muslims, as opposed to theoria, is Kenneth Cragg.

"No study ... can either begin, or end, in vacuo. It may be that Christian commitment, with its proper concern for the significance of God and man, is a surer context for the study of Islam than the type of "science" that knows only how to inquire and not how to worship."<sup>100</sup>

For, "the Christian concern must go beyond the effort of understanding represented by the most careful study of books and documents, into that which these can only serve. For the Christian is the ambassador of a person-to-person relationship. He is an individual debtor to his fellow man. He must surpass the limits of merely academic knowledge. More than the student, he must learn to be in some measure the participant. As the bearer of "the Word made flesh", he must strive to enter into the daily

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99. Stephen Neil, Christian Faith and Other Faiths, pp.3-4.

100. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.viii. "A purely artistic or academic interest in historical religion fails to do it justice. If Islam speaks of God and for God imperiously, God cannot be greeted with a mere agreement to study him. This truth does not invalidate the scholarly duty to understand, to analyse, to explore Islam. It does affirm that such a study remains partial even when it is perfectly discharged." Ibid., p.174. See also Kenneth Cragg, The Dome and the Rock: "It is a curious notion that studied vacancy of mind about God, or law, or life, or men, could feasibly equip the student for all that is Islam." p.6. And - "Man's science undertakes to explain all, and his technology to control all. Then the wonder, the gratitude, the awe, that underlie and inspire the sense of worship, fade and languish." Ibid., p.121.

existence of the Muslims, as believers, adherents and men. This is the prerequisite of being understood and the first element in his response to the minaret's significance."<sup>101</sup>

It is for reasons such as these that a spirit of negative self-criticism has become part of the cultural pre-suppositions of Western Christians. Toynbee's historical perspectives on human civilizations emphasised "the life-cycle of birth, growth, breakdown, of a disintegration which can be checked by the rise of universal churches and empires but then sets in again (unless men take heed in time) and of a new civilization arising from the ashes of the old."<sup>102</sup> Our Western synthesis of life is no exception. The point is presented metaphorically by Michael Polanyi:

"The critical movement which seems to be nearing the end of its course today was perhaps the most fruitful effort ever sustained by the human mind. The past four or five centuries, which have gradually destroyed or overshadowed the whole mediaeval cosmos, have enriched us mentally and morally to an extent unrivalled by any similar duration. But its incandescence has fed on the combustion of the Christian heritage in the oxygen of Greek rationalism, and when the fuel was exhausted, the critical framework itself burnt away."<sup>103</sup>

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101. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, pp.188-189. "We do not merely aim at a resume of Muslim belief and practice. We take it in its own most intimate and inward imperative because we seek to know it, as far as may be, from within." Ibid., p.34.
  102. A. Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History", in Middle Eastern Studies, p.258.
  103. M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, quoted in Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.21.

Certainly, the Western critical outlook has fed on its own inner contradictions - as does any great civilization - to become what appears to be a diseased and dying organism. The dictum 'dare to know' has produced an explosion of knowledge as uncontrollable as is nuclear energy. The doctrine of rights underpinning the constitutions of nation states has generated two world wars, and threatens to give birth to a third which, like a mythical Minotaur, will destroy all that lives.

"We have plucked from the Tree a second apple which has forever imperilled our knowledge of Good and Evil, and we must learn to know these qualities henceforth in the blinding light of our new analytical powers."<sup>104</sup>

The bonheur which served as a rallying standard for a brave new world now lies in the mud of dire poverty and insatiable greed. The Enlightenment challenge to doubt all metaphysics and dogma has launched us into the dilemma of doubting the very purpose for our existence. The awakening to autonomy, both collectively and individually, has ushered in our coming of age, but while Western man "becomes more 'independent, self-reliant and critical', he also becomes more 'isolated, alone and afraid'."<sup>105</sup> In other words, the Western world has on its hands a crisis of meaning. "The 'explanations' which science provides no longer explain ...

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104. M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, quoted in Newbigin The Other Side of 1984, p.25.

105. Max Warren, The Christian Mission, p.24.

We are coming to see that there are 'problems' in human life for which there are no 'solutions'."<sup>106</sup> Indeed, science and technology are beginning to be viewed with scepticism, Capitalism and Communism, locked in a Cain and Abel rivalry, seem prepared to annihilate each other in their jealous hold on what has been achieved. But what is unique about the demise of Western culture is "the dramatic suddenness with which, in the space of one lifetime, our civilization has so completely lost confidence in its own vitality."<sup>107</sup>

One particular point of concern for this study, one which will be developed further in treating of Islam, is the reaction of non-Western religious man to the decline of Western pseudo-Christianity. The following summary is offered by Newbigin.

"A century ago the Western nations so dominated the world that most of the rest of mankind stood in awe of the white man and accepted his claim to political, cultural and religious leadership ... A second stage can be observed ... in which these are rejected and recourse is had to native languages and cultures and to more ancient traditions of social life. But even with this there is still a general readiness to accept the science and technology of the West because of the tangible benefits they seem to bring. It is not clear that this will continue to be so."<sup>108</sup>

Whatever the final outcome, non-Western nations are on the horns of a cultural and spiritual dilemma.

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106. L. Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.18.

107. *Ibid.*, p.3.

108. L. Newbigin, The Open Secret, pp.6-7.

If we summarise Western cultural pre-suppositions as the absolute valuing of personal and national autonomy, the sense of individual and collective self-sufficiency, the drive to apply rational criteria to knowledge of all kinds, and the need for verification, then it must be noted that personal encounter, and in particular interfaith encounter, as formulated in Chapter 1, inevitably presents difficulties. Founded upon personal epistemology, personal encounter focuses upon the other as an equal human presence. Therefore it challenges autonomy, questions self-sufficiency, calls for the gift of the whole person - heart as well as head - and beckons to the transcendent in human experience, the non-verifiable. This means that the event of personal encounter, and especially that of interfaith encounter, cannot be in the control of either of the participants on a pre-supposition of superiority or mastery. It can be controlled only by the Spirit of God. And that Spirit is symbolised by fire that consumes, and wind that blows where it will. Conflict, change, the opening of new horizons, the experience of conversion are integral to real personal encounter. Openness to the other as Thou, and therefore mystery, and to God as the eternal Thou, the ultimate mystery, are absolutely necessary prerequisites.

"Truth, by its very nature, needs other truth. If it cannot relate, its quality of truth must be open to question. Expressed more personally, I establish my identity, my uniqueness, by showing not how I am different from you but how I am a part of you. Without you, I cannot be unique. Truth, without other 'truth', cannot be unique; it cannot exist. Truth, therefore, 'proves itself' not by triumphing over all other truth but by testing its ability to interact with other truths - that is, to teach and be taught by them, to include and be included by them."<sup>109</sup>

Chapter 4 of this study will indicate how a few representatives of the Christian approach to Islam in the 20th Century have exemplified how truth is "two-eyed". But for the vast majority of Western Christians, such a change in cultural and religious perspective has scarcely begun. "Christianity, along with all other world religions, is evolving out of the micro phase of human history in which the various religious traditions grew and consolidated in relative isolation from each other. The direction today is towards a macro phase of history in which each religion will be able to grow and understand itself only through interrelating with other religions."<sup>110</sup>

We come then to Muslim cultural pre-suppositions within encounter. These are far more difficult to delineate clearly for two reasons. The first is that, for Muslims, a distinction between the cultural and the religious simply does not exist. The second is that Muslim cultural pre-suppositions vis-à-vis the West are charged with a reaction which oscillates between negative and positive emotions.

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109. P. Knitter, No Other Name? p.219. "J. A. T. Robinson argues the same point in his elaborate case that 'truth is two-eyed', and that Western Christianity, with its emphasis on the personality of God, the historicity of faith, the importance of the material world, has been peering into the mystery of God with only one eye." Ibid., p.221. See J. A. T. Robinson, Truth is Two-Eyed.

110. P. Knitter, No Other Name?, p.225.

In what follows, only Muslim cultural pre-suppositions vis-à-vis the West are analysed. Muslim cultural pre-suppositions vis-a-vis Islam itself are examined in the chapter on religious pre-suppositions. As has been noted already, in the Muslim mind, what is Western is equated with what is Christian, secular, and imperialist. Yet the Muslim world knows its need for modernization and the technology of the West. The result is a dilemma. "The (Islamic) movement clearly differentiates between development and modernization on the one hand and Westernization and secularization on the other. It says 'yes' to modernization but 'no' to blind westernization."<sup>111</sup> K. Cragg makes the same observation: "The modern mind is right in its instinctive awareness that Islam must either baptise change with its spirit or renounce its own relevance to life. Since it cannot do the latter, it must somehow do the former."<sup>112</sup> Hence the "progressive" Muslim feels himself grappling pioneer-like with a new identity. The "defensive" Muslim is conscious of a critical role new in history. Islam has been in danger before, he knows, but never quite so searchingly. He feels a vocation to serve continuity, just as his opposite member does. They differ in their understanding of what continuity involves."<sup>113</sup>

"... when at any time in history we bring together these

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111. Khurshid Ahmad, "The Nature of the Islamic Resurgence", in Voices of Resurgent Islam, ed. J. L. Esposito, p.224.

112. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.17.

113. Ibid., p.27.

two, continuity through change and change with continuity, we are faced with how the one is validated and the other controlled. How is essential continuity recognisable as such? What are the limits of valid change? Who is to define and who enforce them? At what point must we say that change has become destructive of continuity with the old, that the old, in becoming new, has ceased to be itself?"<sup>114</sup>

Unfortunately, the net result of this dilemma in the Muslim world is bewilderment. "Drift, indifference, bewilderment, or just preoccupation characterise the secular Muslim, rather than hostility."<sup>115</sup>

Muslim reaction to the influence of Western culture has oscillated between, on the one hand aping the West, and on the other condemning it. The importing of Western goods and Western education into Muslim countries has been responsible for this aping of the West and "has led to deep internal repercussions. A new social class has emerged consisting of those persons with a Western education or able to handle the products of Western technology."<sup>116</sup> H. A. R. Gibbs spells out these implications for Egypt:

"It is important for us to appreciate the width of this rift between religious and secular education in Egypt and its far-reaching consequences. Not only has it ranged school against school and university against university; but it has contributed more than any other single factor to the division in Muslim society, which is to be seen especially

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114. Ibid., p.29.

115. Ibid., p.24.

116. W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, pp.141-142.

in the larger towns, ranging orthodox against "Westernizer" in almost every department of social and intellectual activity, in manner of dress, living, social habits, entertainment, literature and even speech."<sup>117</sup>

"Western education, that is to say, has fostered in the Muslim world something of that same double-mindedness that is to be found in our Western society, even if the dualism is partly concealed by a profession of orthodoxy. And thereby a new tension has been introduced into Islamic thought, but a tension of which Muslims in general are not yet fully conscious and whose terms they would find it difficult to define."<sup>118</sup>

A spokesman from the Muslim side decries bitterly the servile imitation of the West among modernised university educated Muslims.

"... by whatever name they are called, most members of this class, who are products of Western-oriented universities, have for the most part one feature in common, and that is a predilection for all things Western and a sense of alienation vis-a-vis things Islamic. This inferiority complex vis-a-vis the West among so many modernized Muslims ... is the greatest malady facing the Islamic world and it afflicts they very group which one would expect to face the challenge of the West. The encounter of Islam with the West cannot therefore be discussed without taking into consideration the type of mentality which is often the product of modern university education and which, during the past century, has produced most of the apologetic Islamic writings which try to concern themselves with the encounter of Islam and the West. This apologetic, modernized type of approach has attempted to answer the challenge of the West

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117. H. A. R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, p.42. Although this is an old study - a publication of the Haskell Lectures in Comparative Religion delivered by Gibb in 1945 at the University of Chicago - its insights have borne the test of time.
118. Ibid., pp.51-52. K. Cragg also draws attention to "the educational duality running through the Muslim world." The Call of the Minaret, p.197.

by bending backwards in a servile attitude to show in one way or another that this or that element of Islam is just what is fashionable in the West today, while other elements, for which there could not be found a Western equivalence by even the greatest stretch of the imagination have been simply brushed aside as unimportant or even extraneous later 'accretions'.<sup>119</sup>

Another equally strong Muslim voice expresses the same concern:

"From the viewpoint of the historical observer the strong, one-sided influence which Western civilization at present exerts on the Muslim world is not at all surprising, because it is the outcome of a long historic process for which there are several analogies elsewhere. But while the historian may be satisfied, for us the problem remains unsettled. For us who are not mere interested spectators, but very real actors in the drama; for us who regard ourselves as the followers of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) the problem in reality begins here. We believe that Islam, unlike other religions, is not only a spiritual attitude of mind, adjustable to different cultural settings, but a self-sufficing orbit of culture and a social system of clearly defined features. When, as is the case today, a foreign civilization extends its radiation into our midst, and causes certain changes in our own cultural organism, we are bound to make it clear to ourselves whether that foreign influence runs in the direction of our own cultural possibilities or against them: whether it acts as an invigorating serum in the body of Islamic culture or as a poison."<sup>120</sup>

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119. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Western World and Its Challenge to Islam" in Islam: Its Meaning and Message, ed. K. Ahmad, p.221. "The most intelligent students at Oxford or Harvard have far less confidence in the West than those modernised orientals who for some time have sacrificed everything on the altar of modernism and are now suddenly faced with the possibility of the total decomposition of this idol. Therefore, they try all the more desperately to cling to it." Ibid., p.222. Nasr pleads for the emergence of "a true intelligentsia" capable of answering the challenge of the West on Muslim terms. See *ibid.*, p.223.
120. Muhammed Asad, "The Spirit of Islam" in Islam: Its Meaning and Message, ed. K. Ahmad, p.46.

H. A. R. Gibb highlights in particular the difficulties Islam has experienced in attempting to integrate an alien epistemology.

"For the great majority of the educated classes, knowledge is still what one knows rather than what one has yet to learn; it is something to be sought and found in books rather than by free enquiry and at the cost of both physical and mental effort. It has no dynamic quality; it lacks power because it is still inorganic, compartmented, and atomistic. It is still dominated by the idea of authority; and if Western "authorities" are now recognised alongside Muslim "authorities", the result is only to create a confusion of thought, made all the worse by the fact that for all but a few the means of testing their authorities (whether Western or Eastern) and of distinguishing their relative value and reliability do not exist. Because of the lack of intellectual standards, there is no check upon credulity."<sup>121</sup>

An ill-fitting garb of epistemology is matched by the donning of Western Romanticism - although this second garb has a better fit.

"The resemblance between the intuitive bent of the Arab and Muslim mind and the Romantic currents in European thought is certainly a very close one, and this may ... explain the rapidity with which the Romantic tendencies in Western thought spread among the educated classes in Islam."<sup>122</sup>

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121. H. A. R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, pp.65-66. "Consider how recent has been the introduction of analytic method into the thought of the Muslim world, how difficult it is to overthrow the age long domination of atomism and authority. Our world has had four centuries in which to adapt itself - how insecurely still - to this revolution in the concept of knowledge, and it cannot be carried through in one or two generations. The new methods have been, in a sense, superimposed from without; they do not spring from interior habits slowly and gradually built up by generations who have lived through the evolution of the new ways of thinking: what is transmitted by mere contact is always superficial, but it need not remain so". Ibid., pp.6-7.

These borrowings from the West are "false gods ... alongside Allah and attempts or claims to serve them all. This is shirk, "pluralism", the unforgiveable sin ... It involves the introduction of modes of thought and institutions alien to the social experience which is at the base of Islamic universalism and creates a confusion of ideals, which must inevitably have repercussions on the whole religious system ... "<sup>123</sup> Gibb claims that "antitoxins" are needed to counteract the "virus" introduced from the West -

"If this is to be realised, however, the Muslim faith will have to show that it possesses the strength and vitality to generate these antitoxins, mainly out of its own resources, but not excluding the possibility of adapting some of the constructive elements in Western thought in place of its destructive romanticism."<sup>124</sup>

Aping the West has set Islam on a false trail. There are clear signs that Muslim thinkers are becoming acutely aware of this falsity. Disillusionment began at the political level, and then moved on to the social level, and for Islam, leads inevitably to the religious level.<sup>125</sup> Politically, the seeds of condemnation

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122. Ibid., p.110. The Romantic movement "was a demand for the release of the imagination from the strait-jacket of imposed standards, a reaction against classicism in all its forms and expressions, an idealisation of the facts and experiences of life and of nature ... It is related to the same category of thoughts as that outburst of popular self-consciousness which lies at the roots of nationalism." Ibid., p.108.

123. Ibid., pp.120-121.

124. Ibid., p.122.

of the West were sown with the Arab sense of betrayal after the creation of the State of Israel.

"One of the crucial elements in contemporary Arab psychology is the ravaging sense amongst its Westerizers of having been let down. This ... came to culmination over Zionism and the establishment of Israel. The modern West for seventy-five years had been bearing down upon the Arab world with what appeared to be irresistible pressure, saying in effect: "Give up these antiquated ways, those superstitions, those inhibitions; be modern with us, prosperous, sophisticated. Emancipate your women, your societies, yourselves!" The theme re-echoed, sometimes with siren beguilement, sometimes with haughty disdain. Many Arabs (like other Easterners) succumbed, or saw their children succumb. Yet those who chose this path found that when a crisis arose the modern West did not effectively care for its converts. It had seduced them from their indigenous loyalties, but took no responsibility for them when they needed it most. The protege of the West proved void of protection."<sup>126</sup>

The response of the whole Muslim world has been one of suspicion ever since. "The depth of this suspicion in many quarters has to be realistically appreciated, if it is to be finally abated."<sup>127</sup>

The same suspicion is extended to Christian missionary activity: "... any effort, however, sincere, to penetrate into the deeper questions of human existence and of life's meaning must inevitably

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125. See P Hitti, Islam and the West, pp.88-93.

126. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Islam in Modern History, p.99. K. Cragg makes the same point: "There are peoples in history, it would seem, for whom events are more than unusually unjust - the Poles, the Koreans, the Jews themselves in Hitler's Europe. Not to see that the Arabs of Palestine are now among that number is to have failed to recognise what Israel means. Those consequences in the Arab world are a serious element in contemporary Islam." The Call of the Minaret, p.196.

127. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.188.

fall foul of communal suspicion and cultural prestige. What is intended for spiritual relationship is all too often seen as cultural subversion."<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the very mention of "conversion" to Muslims "often raises false notions of religious 'imperialism' or cultural competition."<sup>129</sup>

Political disillusionment with the West has developed into social and moral disillusionment which condemns the secularising effects of the West on Muslim society. Fazilur Rahman writes:

"... we shall have to say something about Western society and the critical situation it is in in order to assess the mutual impact of Islam and the West, since it is assumed here that the primary and effective dialogue or encounter or confrontation - whatever the case may be - is not between Islam and Christianity but between Islam and the basically secular West."<sup>130</sup>

He continues:-

"Criticisms of the present day West (and by implication, all societies that are becoming or want to become 'Westernized') have also been many, not all of them serious, sincere, fruitful, or diagnostic. That there is something very much wrong with the West is, I think, quite clear to all of those who care to see, including many Westerners, even though not all will agree on the precise nature or seriousness of the trouble ... What we have termed 'the actual state of affairs in the domestic West' refers to the multiple phenomenon of lawlessness and chaos known to exist in Western society, which are too numerous to be counted here. I do not think

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128. K. Cragg, The Dome and the Rock, p.149.

129. Ibid., p.223.

130. F. Rahman, "Islam: Challenges and Opportunities", in Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, ed. A. Welch, p.(316).

any observer would disagree with this; what is interesting - and, indeed, alarming - is that so few are troubled or even concerned about it. Lawlessness is, at the present, the obverse of free secular democracy. The truth is that Western civilization is a giant now fully corroded from within ... Secular utilitarianism, if we are right, has produced this chaos in the first place; if the social engineers themselves are secular utilitarians, what kind of results can be expected?"<sup>131</sup>

The case is very different in the ideal of Muslim society:-

"In a Muslim society individual morality and social ethics are both derived from the same divine source: the Qu'ran and Sunnah. In secularism, divine guidance becomes irrelevant and man's roots in the divine scheme of creation and his destiny in the life beyond physical existence are denied."<sup>132</sup>

Consequently:-

"Muslims must therefore learn to study the West and its ideas objectively in order to determine how Islam should react to its various pressures. In the brilliant, creative intellectual activity of the West there are both good and bad, as in any other civilization: its principles of democracy, for example, have been espoused by both the Modernist and the neo-Revivalist, while, in its moral effects, the West may have left severe injuries on the human personality ... Unless Muslims learn to study all ideas objectively, including their own and those of the West, there is no way they can face the modern world successfully; indeed, even their survival as Muslims will become highly questionable."<sup>133</sup>

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131. Ibid., pp.327-329.

132. K. Ahmad, "The Nature of the Islamic Resurgence", in Voices of Resurgent Islam, ed. J. L. Esposito, p.218.

133. F. Rahman, "Islam: Challenges and Opportunities", in Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, pp.324-325.

The challenge of the secular West has meant that "the whole of the Muslim ummah has somehow passed through a trauma, becoming more and more conscious that the Westernizing model cannot deliver the goods. They want to make a fresh start. They do not want to cut themselves off from the rest of the world. But they also do not want to be dependent on the non-Muslim world. They want freedom with strength; friendship with honour; co-operation without dependence. If the Westernizing experiment has failed to achieve this, what next? The Islamic movement represents one such alternative."<sup>134</sup>

The Islamic revival is, in large measure, a reactionary movement against the control and influence of the West - the Christian West in the eyes of Muslims. In terms of cultural presuppositions, the Muslim world believes that Western civilization is corrupt, socially and spiritually, and that Christians could have prevented this demise had they been more true to religion and strong enough to impose Christian values. However, Muslim thinkers recognise also that all is not well with Islam, socially and spiritually, but they all agree that a reformed and strengthened Islam is the only alternative to the domination of the West. Differences arise as to the methods to be adopted and the means taken. The result is a melting pot of reactionism - a bubbling mixture of nationalism, apologetics, the push of progression and the pull of conservatism.

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134. K. Ahmad, "The Nature of Islamic Resurgence", in Voices of Resurgent Islam, ed. J. L. Esposito, pp.224-225.

Islamic nationalism is a borrowing from the West.

"It is obvious that the nationalist movements in the various Muslim areas have become strenuous and almost overriding. A great deal of the energy of the entire Muslim world has been devoted to the long struggle to ward off or oust foreign domination: such nationalism, of course, here as elsewhere, is highly complex. It is related to nationalism in Europe: both the ideas and institutions of the West affected deeply the Westernized minority who led the movement."<sup>135</sup>

A defensive reaction against the West has also engendered among Muslims an excessive use of apologetics and polemics. Apologetics for Muslims is "the endeavour to prove to oneself or others, that Islam is sound. An appreciation of this is altogether basic to an understanding of recent Muslim interpretation. For an almost overwhelming proportion of current Muslim religious thinking comes under this heading. Most books and speeches on the faith by those within it today are defensive."<sup>136</sup>

"The 'defense' of Islam may be analysed roughly into a three-fold orientation: against attack, against unbelief, against Westernization. The three, of course, overlap: the

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135. W. C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p.73. Cragg notes "present aspects of Muslim 'otherness' in relation to the West and to 'Christian' nations. It must not be thought that the adaptation of many Western forms of political and social life signified either a passive or an hospitable attitude toward the West itself. Rather, the nationalism into which the West has educated the Muslim East, means a sharpened quality in the sentiments of the newly independent peoples." The Call of the Minaret, p.194.

136. Ibid., p.85.

differentiation is purely interpretive. The apologetics have set themselves to answering the direct assaults on Islam of Western critics, which especially before the First World War were numerous and often caustic - attacks in the name of Christianity, rationalism, liberal progress or the like. The West today has little inkling of how mordant and sustained was its earlier denegration of Islam. Secondly, the apologetics have endeavoured to check a tendency to disloyalty among their own community, especially its educated youth. These, like educated youth throughout the world, have seemed liable to abandon their faith under the pressure of modern living and modern thought, and simply to drift. Thirdly, they have felt the need to ward off the tendency of the same Muslims to adopt new and un-Islamic ways and even values (chiefly "Western" or "modern" according to one's interpretation; ...)"<sup>137</sup>

Muslim apologetics and polemics<sup>138</sup> have not only erected barriers in contemporary Muslim-Christian relations, but have also held back the true course of Islam.

"The basic description of apologetics is that it has diverted the attention of contemporary Islamic thinkers from their central task - the central task of all thinkers: to pursue truth and to solve problems. A lack of integrity always leads to disintegration; and any failure of intellectual integrity in a society raises the threat of disastrous intellectual disintegration. The Muslim world, including its intelligentsia, has hardly recognised what a responsible, crucial role its intellectual class plays in the present crisis; and how far the future of Islam and of the Muslim community depends on the ability of the

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137. Ibid., p.86.

138. See W. M. Watt, "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue" in Hamdand Islamicus: "The 'defence' of a society's symbolization of reality, that is, of its religion, consists of what are traditionally known as polemics and apologetics. It is shown that the alternative symbolization is inferior and even nonsensical, while one's own symbolization is superior and rationally justified." p.7. Also, see D. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours" in Islamochristiani: "Polemics seem to arise from a situation in which the polemicist feels threatened." p.6.

intellectual to face, understand, analyse and solve the new issues that confront them."<sup>139</sup>

Reform as a means of self defence has reverberated throughout the Muslim world for the past one hundred years. "The tendency now is to repudiate the teachings of the past on fatalism, the inferiority of women, blind obedience to authority, lack of a healthy spirit of scepticism, and a low public morality. Contact with the West has stimulated self-criticism, and there are not wanting signs that the new generation is determined to put an end to this state of affairs if it possibly can."<sup>140</sup> There is a new dynamism for reform in modern Islam, "the appreciation of activity for its own sake, and at the level of feeling a stirring of intense, even violent, emotionalism."<sup>141</sup> While part of this force shows signs of being creative at the level of Westernized scholarship,<sup>142</sup> much of it at the more popular and theological level, is a negative dynamism, a retreating into traditionalism and conservatism in order to

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139. W. C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p.87.

140. Alfred Guillaune, Islam, p.192.

141. W. C. Smith, Islam in Modern History, p.89.

142. See W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today: "Essentially a response is creative when a person, without abandoning any central religious doctrines, tries to effect a degree of harmony between these and the current scientific and philosophical outlook, and in so doing to provide a basis for dealing with social and political problems." p.143. See also W. C. Smith, Islam in Modern History: "Our own view is that liberalism and humanism in the Muslim world, if they are to flourish at all, may perhaps be Islamic liberalism and Islamic humanism; or that in any case, some basis must be found for matters of this weight." p.303.

reassert Islamic identity.

"People looking for security think of 'the good old days' when the old religion was properly observed. One aspect of this insecurity is the fear of being, as it were, drowned in Western culture and losing one's traditional identity. Consequently, in turning to the old religion they tend to emphasise those features which make it culturally distinct from the West, such as the prohibition of alcohol and usury and the use of the veil and similar coverings by women. To this extent the Islamic movement is a reassertion of identity, indeed a reassertion of identity against the West."<sup>143</sup>

The leaders of the negative reassertion are the ulama, the official guardians of Islamic theology. "The attitude of the vast majority of the orthodox ulama resembles that of the Roman Catholic hierarchy toward the similar problem in our own civilization. It is a strict and unbending refusal to countenance any kind of truckling to the new philosophies and sciences."<sup>144</sup>

"The history of Islam has shown that it has extraordinary powers of adaptation: it has succeeded in absorbing apparently incompatible philosophies, and mutually contradicting religious conceptions, and it has silently abandoned others which it has tried and found wanting. Its one danger is that the old forces of reaction will be too strong for the new spirit of liberalism, armed as they are with shibboleths and anathemas which can rouse the ignorant masses and terrorise men of vision. Only time can show which party will gain the upper hand."<sup>145</sup>

The hope is that Muslim creativity will win the day, for

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143. W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.142.

144. H. A. R. Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, p.47.

145. A. Guillaume, Islam, p.193.

Islam has a major and significant contribution to make to the future development of religious and social ideals. "To create positive links between certain key Western institutions - democracy, science, women's education - and the Islamic tradition through the very sources of that tradition, namely the Qur'an and the Prophet, is no mean achievement by any standards. And the creation of these links is by no means artificial or forced: how many will deny today that the numerous Quranic verses that talk about the exploitability of all nature for the benefit of man have a direct bearing on the cultivation of science? that the Quranic passages about egalitarianism and justice are directly conducive to the acceptance of a democratic system of government? or, that the tremendous threat of the Quranic teaching on the subject of strengthening the weaker segments of society - the poor, slaves, etc - and the attention it pays in particular to women and to the regulation of relationships between the sexes has direct relevance for human welfare in general and the increasing role of women in today's Muslim society?"<sup>146</sup>

When we consider Muslim cultural pre-suppositions in the light of the ideal of personal encounter, we must come to much the same conclusions as those arrived at in regard to Christians. Muslim conviction that Christians are to be identified with the imperialism, rationalism and secularism of the West erects

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146. F. Rahman, "Islam: Challenges and Opportunities", in Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenges, ed. A. Welch, p.(320).

defensive barriers which preclude an openness to Christians as Christians and as persons. It means that these barriers have to be removed before Muslims can be free to listen to, appreciate and respect Christians as persons of integrity, humility and faith. There is a deep sense of cultural inferiority in the Muslim consciousness vis-à-vis the West. Personal encounter can only happen between equals. The more equal to Christians Muslims begin to feel, on their own terms, and not those of the West, the more will personal encounter begin to be a possibility and a joy for adherents of both faiths. The onus for change would seem to lie more with Christians than with Muslims. A backlog of a hundred years of cultural domination rests on the Christian side and must be worked at patiently and humbly. Only when this is cleared will Muslims be able to relate in the present, to present day Christians, and only then will they begin to realise that the multiple equation - Christian equals Western, equals imperialist, equals secularist - is invalid in many instances. Khurshid Ahmad sums up the situation thus:

"The real competition ... (is) ... at the level of two cultures and civilizations, one based upon Islamic values and the other on the values of materialism and nationalism. Had Western culture been based on Christianity, on morality, on faith, the language and modus operandi of the contact and conflict would have been different. But that is not the case. The choice is between the Divine Principle and a secular materialist culture ... If in the Muslim mind and the Muslim viewpoint, Western powers remain associated with efforts to perpetuate the Western model in Muslim society, keeping Muslims tied to the system of Western domination at national and international levels and thus destabilising Muslim culture and society directly or indirectly, then, of course, the tension will increase. Differences are bound to multiply. And if things are not resolved peacefully through dialogue and understanding; through respect for each other's rights and genuine concerns, they are destined to be resolved

otherwise. But if, on the other hand, we can acknowledge and accept that this world is a pluralistic world, that Western culture can co-exist with other cultures and civilizations without expecting to dominate over them, that others need not necessarily be looked upon as enemies or foes but as potential friends, then there is a genuine possibility that we can learn to live with our differences. If we are prepared to follow this approach, then we will be able to discover many a common ground and many a common challenge. Otherwise, I am afraid we are heading for hard times."<sup>147</sup>

Having surveyed Christian-Muslim cultural pre-suppositions the conclusion must be drawn that the only fruitful way forward for Christian-Muslim relations is that of personal encounter wherein participants respect the personhood of the other, transcend pre-judgements, develop a "response-ability" and a sense of commitment to truth and love, accept a modifying of cultural autonomy, and enter into a mutuality which, though still affected by conflict, is not crushed by it, because it is essentially open to God speaking in the Thou of the other.

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147. K. Ahmad, "The Nature of Islamic Resurgence" in Voices of Resurgent Islam, ed. J. L. Esposito, p.228.

#### Chapter 4 Christian-Muslim personal encounter: the influence of religious pre-suppositions.

The difficulties inherent in constructing and using a schematization of pre-suppositions for the analysis of Christian-Muslim personal encounter become particularly obvious in the case of religious pre-suppositions. On both sides, the ideal of faith calls for a response to, and integration of, the whole of human life and history. Therefore, in the strict sense, there should be no "religious" category as distinct from others. Such categorising leads easily to distortions, in particular the distortion of seeing Islam and Christianity as evolving socio-religious systems rather than as the personal faith of men and women.<sup>1</sup> The following analysis is offered with these reservations in mind.

Religious pre-suppositions have been, and are, as influential in the development of Muslim-Christian relations as are the historical and cultural. Their contribution towards the

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1. The exercise itself betrays the author's own cultural pre-suppositions! See Chapter 3 of this study, note 72. "This method of analysing something into simpler constituent parts is of proven worth in science, notably in chemistry. It has shown its ability to achieve important results, and has become the basis of much scientific and science-based technological activity. Yet even where the method is successful, it is difficult to say precisely what it tells about reality .... since there are wholes which are more than the sum of their parts, and even wholes in which a central or holistic factor somehow controls the parts." W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.39 and pp.42-43. While the method can lead to a helpful mapping of the territory, it can lead also to false trails and dead ends.

ideal of personal encounter is both positive and negative: positive in that they call forth a response to the challenge of unity, and negative in that they also constitute stumbling blocks to unity, to mutual understanding and acceptance.

The first Christian religious pre-supposition which can be identified is the call to unity, to the breaking down of religious and social barriers. Christian belief in God's creating and saving of the world in Christ urges believers to desire and work for the unity for which Christ prayed, lived and died. The Christian challenge to love without distinction of persons, even to love one's enemies, likewise urges believers to seek unity and reconciliation with all men in the name of Christ. It was this pre-supposition which inspired the calling of the Chambésy conference. I would venture to suggest that Christians see the call to unity as the most important of their religious convictions. Christian philosophers of history and religion in the 20th century have pointed to the call for global unity as the paramount task of the Christian community today. W. E. Hocking wrote in 1956:

"Today we seem to be standing on the threshold of a new thing, civilization in the singular ... For the first time our entire world space is permeated with ideas which Locke said about truth and the keeping of faith, "belong to man as man and not as a member of a society." Here and there in the Orient there is still revulsion from the clinging localisms of western thought and practice, but none towards what we may call the clean Universals, the sciences, the mathematics, the technics - these it claims not as borrowings from the west, but as its own. In giving birth to the universal, the west has begotten something which can never again be private property."<sup>2</sup>

L. Newbigin directs attention to this "civilization in the

singular." He summarises its scientific context in terms of an objective accumulation of knowledge and applied skills, and sees as "the driving power of it all, the widespread conviction that human life can be and ought to be changed."<sup>3</sup> This "driving power" of progress has an independent momentum even from the fortunes of the Christendom which bore it. "What we are witnessing is the process by which all peoples are being drawn into a unitary world history."<sup>4</sup> But, "a world history is only possible if there is some kind of belief concerning the origin and destiny of mankind as a whole."<sup>5</sup> Newbigin registers this concern as essentially religious because it raises the questions of human existence and destiny. In this he joins Max Warren who recognised the movement towards world unity as the religious need of the present and of the future. Even Communism is to be seen in this light.

"Religiously, Communism expounds its whole programme in terms of an idealism which is at bottom, an affirmation of faith, a conviction about the inevitability of progress which gives hope, and a messianic conviction about destiny and purpose which gives the impulse for self-sacrifice and martyrdom to which at its best we dare not deny the quality of love. And all of these together combine to present Communism to multitudes as the true way to a community in which they can lose their sense of isolation, aloneness and fear."<sup>6</sup>

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2. W. E. Hocking, The Coming World Civilization, quoted in L. Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984, p.64.
  3. L. Newbigin, A Faith For This One World? p.18 ff.
  4. Ibid., p.24.
  5. Ibid., p.27.
  6. M. Warren, The Christian Mission, p.27.

But Communism can show also the dangers of a spurious unity which rides roughshod over individual, local, national and religious particularisms. "If we are positively to enjoy differences we have to learn where our true security lies ... Enjoyment is something very different from toleration".<sup>7</sup> In a pluralist world caught up in a unitary history, where does security lie for the man or woman of faith? This is a radical question for the Christian believer, indeed for any believer, for it challenges the nature and validity of religious affiliations.

"Unless men can learn to understand and to be loyal to each other across religious frontiers, unless we can build a world in which people profoundly of different faiths can live together and work together, then the prospects for our planet's future are not bright ... I would even make bold to say that the future progress of one's own cherished faith even within one's own community, depends more largely than most of us have realised on the ability to solve the question of comparative religion. Unless a Christian can contrive intelligently and spiritually to be a Christian not merely in a Christian society or a secular society but in the world; unless a Muslim can be a Muslim in the world ... unless, I say, we can together solve the intellectual and spiritual questions posed by comparative religion, then I do not see how a man is to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist at all."<sup>8</sup>

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7. M. Warren, "The Threat of Religious Pluralism", in New Fire pp.245-246.
  8. W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, pp.9 and 11. See also ibid., pp.200-201. See also K. Cragg: "In being concerned for a worldwide expression of Christ, the Christian mind is involved inextricably in the major issues attaching to one worldness in our day ... The meeting of faiths is not to be seen as prudent conformity to external necessity. It is rather the obligation of their nature and their ancient sense of the metaphysical oneness of humanity. For the latter must be the spring of guidance when physical forces impose an externally common predicament but do not themselves illuminate its nature or undertake its burdens." The Call of the Minaret, pp.179 & 181.



P. Knitter deals with the same challenge, emphasizing the personal nature of the knowledge to be acquired.

"The knowledge that is making religious pluralism a newly experienced reality is not just a knowledge of other religious systems or ideas. It is also, and especially, a knowledge of other religious persons. It is one thing to confront a religious truth in the abstract - on the printed page or in a classroom lecture; it is quite another to see it enfolded in the life of a friend. That is what is happening in our shrinking world ... To have a friend, a colleague, or a neighbour who has found meaning according to a religious path that apparently is quite different from Christianity not only impresses but disturbs us."<sup>9</sup>

The adherents of various world faiths "are being urged by what seems to be the creative lure within all reality toward a new form of unity, a unitive pluralism."<sup>10</sup>

"Unitive pluralism is a new understanding of religious unity and must not be confused with the old, rationalistic idea of "one world religion" in either of its alternative brand names. The new vision of religious unity is not syncretism, which boils away all the historical differences between religions in order to institutionalise their common core; nor is it imperialism, which believes that there is one religion that has the power of purifying and then absorbing all the others. Nor is it a form of lazy tolerance which calls upon all religions to recognise each other's validity and then to ignore each other as they go their own self-satisfied ways. Rather, unitive pluralism is a unity in which each religion, although losing some of its individualism (its separate ego) will intensify its personality (its self-awareness through relationship). Each religion will retain its own uniqueness, but this uniqueness will develop and take on new depths by relating to other religions in mutual dependence."<sup>11</sup>

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9. P. Knitter, No Other Name? p.3.

10. Ibid., p.9.

11. Ibid., p.9.

The identifying of unitive pluralism with the concept and practice of personal encounter becomes obvious.<sup>12</sup>

But the Christian religious pre-supposition that all men of faith are called to unitive pluralism gives rise to the most radical self-questioning. "Because of Jesus Christ, Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all man, which cannot recognise any other religion beside itself as of equal right ... This pluralism is a greater threat and a reason for greater unrest for Christianity than for any other religion. For no other religion - not even Islam - maintains as absolutely that it is the religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living God as does the Christian religion. The fact of the pluralism of religions, which endures and still from time to time becomes virulent and even after a history of two thousand years, must therefore be the greatest scandal and the greatest vexation for Christianity."<sup>13</sup> This is because the "fundamental premise of unitive pluralism is that all religions are, or can be equally valid. This means that their founders, the religious figures

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12. See *ibid.*; "The stranger, the new face, the man with the turban or the woman of a different skin color will no longer appear to us as a threat or an adversary but as a partner and friend. We will come to feel that as long as there are strangers - persons we do not know - we really do not know ourselves ... It is becoming clear how hidebound and naive and arrogant we can be when we never step out of our temples or churches. To answer the question "who is my God?", we must ask the question "Who is your God?." pp.11 and 12.
13. Karl Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions', in Theological Investigations, vol. V, quoted in P. Knitter, No Other Name? p.17

behind them, are or can be equally valid. But that would open up the possibility that Jesus Christ is "one among many" in the world of saviors and revealers. Such a recognition, for the Christian, is simply not allowed. Or is it?"<sup>14</sup>

" In the face of religious pluralism, Christian theology will not only have to elaborate an account of these other religions; it will also have to render a new account of itself. Herein lie the more difficult questions and therefore the greater opportunities. Most of these questions hover around the traditional self-understanding of Christianity as unique, exclusive, superior, definitive, normative, absolute. It is the old question posed by the pagan philosopher Symmachus to St Ambrose in AD 384: If the Christian God is indeed a God of love who desires all to be saved, why did that God wait so long to send the Savior? Why have human beings been allowed to seek God along so many different paths for such a long time? The question, in our age, is posed anew and with urgency. Perhaps, therefore, new answers can be hoped for."<sup>15</sup>

Christians today know they are "perhaps experiencing a Kairos with as great a promise of self-transformation as the Kairos experienced in confronting the Greco-Roman world ... "The impact of agnostic science will turn out to be child's play compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faiths of other men".<sup>16</sup>

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14. P. Knitter, No Other Name? p.17.

15. Ibid., p.15.

16. Ibid., p.20. The quotation from Max Warren has been taken from W. C. Smith The Faith of Other Men. See also P. Knitter; "In our contemporary world of many religions, encountering each other as never before, can Christianity continue to be the same Christianity it has been for the past nineteen centuries? Can Christians continue to understand and present their religion as bearing the fulness

The Christian call to unitive pluralism, then, represents both a challenge and an opportunity first recognised by Christian missionaries, and their work has generated a second Christian religious pre-supposition within interfaith encounter - the concept of Christian presence. In what follows, the principles of Christian presence are outlined, and their application to Christian-Muslim missionary encounters noted.

The concept of Christian presence has been formulated by Christian missionary theologians in recent decades. The writings of John V. Taylor are of particular note. He identifies a power in the human person which makes possible real presence to another. "We might call it the power of his personhood, the power of his separate otherness, the power by which he is recognised as himself. But it is also his power to recognise, to be impinged upon by, the otherness of the persons, things, realities which are not himself."<sup>17</sup> "This power creates the seeing which is not observation but encounter."<sup>18</sup> And the quality of the encounter is that of the numinous whereby someone's or something's otherness

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and the normative expression of God's revelation? More specifically and more painfully: Can they continue to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the only savior and incarnation of God in human history?" No Other Name? p.73. See also W. M. Watt. "It is unlikely that the great religions will continue indefinitely to follow parallel axes, but, until the future condition of world religion is known, there can be no definitive global sacral history." Islam and Christianity Today p.115.

17. J. V. Taylor, The GoBetween God p.7.
18. Ibid., p.8.

commands awesome attention. This is "to submit to being the object of their impact. From one point of view, this is a dangerously subjective way of knowing truth, but from another point of view it is the only way in which truth authenticates itself."<sup>19</sup> Authentication happens because the power at work elicits from the one acted upon a kind of "yes". "As soon as 'being' becomes 'presence' it has already become part of that to which it is present."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the power in question is a personal power "because the effect of this power is always to turn a mere object into personal relationship with me, to turn an It into a Thou."<sup>21</sup> (We may note the influence of Martin Buber's work on the development of the concept of Christian presence). For the Christian, the power is the Holy Spirit.

Taylor's perspective is that it is the work of the Spirit of God in man's spirit to bring to birth a "seeing" of the world which is real encounter with the "seen" and is characterised by a response of unreserved celebration. The example is Jesus who "seemed to delight in his share of the interdependence of all mankind ... (and) ... wanted to be remembered as a man with a cup in his hand."<sup>22</sup> Such "seeing" is rooted in "that common humanity which we share with all mankind."<sup>23</sup>

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19. Ibid., p.13.

20. Ibid., p.13.

21. Ibid., p.17.

22. Ibid., p.93.

The truth of our common humanity is foundational to the concept of Christian presence. Not only Christian missionary theologians, but also ecclesiastical councils and conferences have accepted our shared humanity as the starting point for Christian presence to non-Christians, and therefore as the starting point for personal encounter. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council committed the Roman Catholic Church to an encounter rooted in a shared humanity. "For, since God made all races of men and gave them the whole earth to inhabit, all nations form a single community with common origin ... From his different religions, man seeks the answer to the riddles and problems of human existence."<sup>24</sup> In 1975, the World Council of Churches at Nairobi "grappled for the first time in ecumenical history ... with the basic pre-supposition and the possible goals of a common search with peoples of other faiths and ideologies for a wider community in one world."<sup>25</sup>

Emphasis on a Christian presence to men and women of other faiths as fellow human beings is a basic premise of recent missionary writings. Lesslie Newbigin, for instance, returns to

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23. Max Warren. "The third emphasis, which proved to be a distinctive note of Max's writings in his later years, was upon "that shared humanity which we share with all mankind"." F. W. Dillistone, Into All the World, p.198.
  24. The Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to the Non-Christian Religions, printed in Christianity and the Other Religions, ed. J. Hick p.80.
  25. C. F. Hallencreutz, Dialogue and Community, p.95.

it again and again. "Surely we must insist that the 'light that enlightens every man' shines not only, perhaps not even chiefly, in man's religion; rather, we may see it shining in the ordinary fidelities of home, business and national life."<sup>26</sup> Beneath the different religions are "feelings and experiences" familiar to the Christian "because they are part of the one human nature which he shares with all men."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it has to be recognised that "the 'point of contact' ... at which the gospel 'comes home' to an ordinary man is very often in relation to some experience of his secular life which has no obvious reference to his religious beliefs and practices."<sup>28</sup> One may go further and suggest that, for the Christian, there should be no dichotomy whatever between "the sacred" and "the secular", and that only the breakdown of this false divide can open Christians to the revelation of God inherent in the lives of men and women of other faiths and ideologies, because only then will Christian faith itself cease to operate as an ideology, and become manifest in its uniqueness as life lived in Jesus.

The latter point is developed by L. Newbigin several times in his writings. He writes of the gospel announcement:

"It is not the teaching of a new way of personal salvation after the manner of the Buddha. Nor is it the announcement

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26. L. Newbigin, The Finality of Christ, p.43.

27. Ibid., p.21.

28. Ibid., p.46.

of a theocratic kingdom in the manner of Islam ... It is the announcement of an event which concerns the whole human situation and not merely one aspect of it - the religious aspect, for example."<sup>29</sup>

Personal encounter based upon the Christian religious pre-supposition of our shared humanity in Christ can be described as 'celebratory encounter'. Its theological grounding is the Christian doctrines of creation, trinity, and incarnation. The world, and all peoples within it, has been created and is being sustained by the Father of life. The incarnation of Jesus, the Son, draws all things into the Father's love. The release of the Spirit enables all things to respond to the Father, through the Son, in praise and trust. This is basically Newbigin's perspective in The Open Secret. The bringing to light of the reign of the Father is "the origin, meaning, the end of the universe and of all man's history within the history of the universe."<sup>30</sup> The incarnation of the Son means that "all the gifts which the Father has lavished on mankind belong in fact to Jesus, and it will be the work of the Spirit to restore them to their true owner."<sup>31</sup> In summary: "It is the open secret of God's purpose, through Christ, to bring all things to their true end in the glory of the triune God."<sup>32</sup> The "open secret" then, is a

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29. Ibid., pp. 42-49. (In parenthesis, it is interesting to note that Buddhism regards itself as more than "a new way of personal salvation", and that Islam also regards itself as "the announcement of an event which concerns the whole human situation". The premise of a shared humanity before God raises many more questions than it can answer).

30. L. Newbigin, The Open Secret, p.32.

31. Ibid., pp. 202-203.

cause for Christian celebration, of rejoicing in the gift of life given to all men by the Father, lived by and in the Son, and to be gratefully acknowledged in the Spirit.

"The Christian confession of Jesus as Lord does not involve any attempt to deny the work of God in the lives and thought and prayers of men and women outside the Christian church. On the contrary, it ought to involve an eager expectation of, a looking for and rejoicing in that work."<sup>33</sup>

Here we have the character of Christian presence. Taylor describes this as "humbly watching in any situation in which we find ourselves in order to learn what God is trying to do there, and then doing it with him."<sup>34</sup> M Warren formulated and developed a similar concept of divine prevenience. He spoke of the challenge "to unveil the God who is already there."<sup>35</sup>

"....'in the beginning God'. In the beginning of every religious experience, in every one of mankind's religions - God! In the beginning of every political change and every political revolution - God! In the beginning of all culture, and of every mutation of culture - God!"<sup>36</sup>

Thus:

"The mission of the Christian is not to take Christ to some place from which he is absent but to go into all the world and discover Christ there, and in a Christly way, there to uncover the unknown Christ. The uncovering will be as much a surprise to the Christian as to the Hindu, or the Muslim, or the Buddhist."<sup>37</sup>

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32. Ibid., p.213.

33. Ibid., p.198.

34. J. V. Taylor, The GoBetween God, p.39.

35. F. W. Dillistone, Into All the World, p.197.

36. Ibid., p.197.

In the development of Christian-Muslim relations, this missionary principle of Christian presence was exemplified, amongst others, in the life and work of Louis Massignon (1883-1962). His uncovering of the "unknown Christ" of Islam took the form of a personal conversion back to Christianity.

"... in 1908 I had become, through my understanding of Arabic, the liturgical language of Islam, an 'internalised Islamologist', i.e. an Islamologist who was converted back to his own religion, Christianity, by the testimony to God which the Islamic faith bore ..."<sup>38</sup>

Describing his experience, at that time, of Muslim hospitality to the point of self-sacrificing love in order to ensure his freedom during the Turkish revolution, Massignon writes: "I remember that my first prayer to God in prison, when I was bound, fettered, naked and had nothing to wear on my back, was in Arabic."<sup>39</sup> At that moment, Arabic became the medium of God's self-revelation in Christ.

"The Arabs, who had been 'excluded' from the covenant as descendents of Ishmael, have only their language as the means of attaining a revelation of the divine Word (and they have attained it!). And this is why they love it so profoundly. I myself love it too because it brought me back to Christ."<sup>40</sup>

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37. Ibid., p.203.

38. Louis Massignon, Opera Minora, Vol. III quoted in Guillio Basetti-Sani Louis Massignon: Christian Ecumenist, p.43.

39. L. Massignon, Opera Minora, Vol. II quoted in G. Basetti-Sani, Ibid., p.43.

40. L. Massignon, Opera Minora, Vol. II quoted in G. Basetti-

"From then on, Louis Massignon's calling in life was determined. As a Christian, he would be the hostage of Islam in our midst and, reciprocally, amongst the Muslims, consecrated as he was to their destiny as a people excluded from the Covenant, he would offer himself as surety for their eventual liberation and reconciliation. This was a fertile paradox which would be taken up by him in its hardest difficulty and which explains his unmatched power of mediation which he demonstrated in his activity and his work."<sup>41</sup>

Such a close presence to Muslims brought Massignon into the heart of the mystery of Islam: "... the profoundly religious attitude with which Massignon .... attempted to approach Islam as something "sacred" allowed him to discover a new image, characterised by an authentic spiritual and supernatural inwardness, of the religion of the Qur'an. Beginning with the promise made by God to Abraham of a "blessing for Abraham's son, Ishmael also", Massignon .... invited the Christians to ponder carefully in the light of the various elements of the Biblical story of Abraham, the meaning of the way Islam burst so powerfully upon the scene of world religious history."<sup>42</sup> More specifically: "Before God, Mohammad went back to Abraham and

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Sani, *Ibid.*, p.44.

41. J. Mercanton, Memorial Louis Massignon, quoted in G. Basetti-Sani, *Ibid.*, p.46.
42. G. Basetti-Sani, Louis Massignon: Christian Ecumenist, p.51.

reclaimed, for the Arabs alone, all of their spiritual and temporal heritage .... wherever Islam spread the flavour of the new monotheistic revelation, it invited the conquered peoples to discover among the heroes of their own past history one of the '124,000 prophets of God' recognised by Islam ... Islam invited the nations to participate in its re-vindication of the patriarchal blessing, and associated the peoples in its own vocation which was to spread Abrahamitic monotheism throughout the world ..."<sup>43</sup> Massignon's final conclusion, therefore, is that 'conversion' for the Muslim means "the thorough search for whatever is most noble in their religious loyalty and which our presence wants to bring about in them ... we must work to make sure that they find liberation within themselves, accepting in their soul that image of the insulted Christ, the Redeemer, which has moved us to love them and if necessary, to give them everything we own."<sup>44</sup>

A more recent exponent of Christian missionary presence vis-à-vis Muslims, Kenneth Cragg, writes in a vein similar to Massignon:

"He (the Christian) cannot escape the relation of his own coming to God through Christ to the Muslim call to surrender. His convictions about the Apostles of the New Testament must bear upon his attitudes to the Apostle of Islam. Prophethood as he has known it in Isaiah and

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43. Ibid., p.54.

44. Louis Massignon, Opera Minora, Vol. II quoted in G. Basetti-Sani, Ibid., pp. 108-109.

Jeremiah must shape him as a reader when he comes to the Qur'an."<sup>45</sup>

One must go even further and say:

"To hold back from the fullest meeting with Muslims would be to refrain from the fullest discipleship to Christ. For the valid Christianity is the interpretive Christianity."<sup>46</sup>

Christian celebratory encounter, in all these various expressions, requires a rejoicing in pluralism. But wherein lies the Christian's identity as called in Christ, and wherein lies the purpose of mission within encounter?

"There are a multitude of theological questions which this type of approach legitimately prompts. For instance, there is the question of the ultimate nature of divine revelation, and especially of the revelation in Christ; the question of the nature of the church and the sacraments; and the question of human personality and responsibility."<sup>47</sup>

Celebratory encounter, then, (becoming present to an adherent of another faith as someone graced by God in Christ) has developed inevitably into 'critical encounter', (c.f. the N.T. Greek word krisis - "a judgement"). Christian participants have found themselves led into a judgement in regard to their Christian beliefs and expressions. Acceptance of the need to criticise Western theological expressions must, in fact, be counted as a

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45. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.177.

46. Ibid., p.179. "He who goes out humbly with Christ into the world of all races will perpetually discover the multiple, but constant, relevance of what he takes." Ibid., p.183. "Islam is particularly calculated to put the Christian interpreter on his mettle since it forces him to a radical and patient expression of his faith." Ibid., p.274.

47. E. Sharpe. Faith Meets Faith, p.128.

third Christian religious pre-supposition within encounter. As such, it operates as part of that modifying of autonomy leading to change which results from a commitment to another as a Thou. It is also part of that absolute openness to God which opens participants to the truth of the other as this is expressed and shared.<sup>48</sup> And finally, it is part of the conversion process inherent in inter-faith encounter.<sup>49</sup>

The theological grounding for critical encounter is the Christian doctrine of the atonement (at-one-ment) of man with God in and through the death of Jesus. Atonement was, and is necessary because man chooses to live estranged from God in an attitude of self-assertive independence. The incarnation of the Word was the making flesh of the perfect, filial, human "yes" in response to God. (2 Cor. 1:19-20) But that "yes" acted as a judgement on the "no" of disobedient man. It acted as a judgement on the "no" of Judaism and brought about the death of Jesus by crucifixion. The cross became God's judgement on law and lawlessness alike, and stands forever as the point of crisis in man's relation with God, whether that relation be religious or non-religious.

Critical encounter, then, brings into question all religion and law, all human systems of spiritual and ethical achievement,

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48. See Chapter 1. of this study.

49. Ibid.

including Christianity. This is because religion lived as law takes all the goodness in our human nature, given by God, and makes of it "the basis for a claim on our own behalf, a claim that we have so to speak, a standing in our own right."<sup>50</sup> This is a standing over against God whereby we consider God is obliged to pronounce over us the sentence "Not guilty!" ... "The cross of Jesus is on the one hand the exposure of this terrible fact and on the other hand, God's way of meeting it."<sup>51</sup> Jesus was crucified because he was a subverter of Jewish law. Crucifixion excommunicated him from the righteousness of that law, but, in God's wisdom, it also freed him from the law to become "the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth." (Col. 1:20)

Religion, even Christian religion, is not the means of salvation and reconciliation. For the Christian, only faith in Jesus died and risen is salvation and reconciliation. This was Karl Barth's contention and the cornerstone of his theological edifice. The service of evangelical Protestantism has been the relativising of all religious systems in the light of the wisdom of the cross. J. V. Taylor writes:

"It is as judge and saviour of the religious tradition itself that Christ's relevance to each religion will be found ... (For) ...man uses religion as a means of escaping from God ... (Jesus') fulfilment of any religion is bound to be no less disturbing than was his fulfilment of Judaism."<sup>52</sup>

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50. L. Newbigin, The Open Secret, p.199.

51. Ibid., p.200.

And that must include Christianity.

A recurring theme for Newbigin and Warren is the idea of 'Kenosis' in inter-faith encounter. Warren speaks of "a new nakedness", a being "stripped of all attitudes of superiority and privilege",<sup>53</sup> in the service of mission. Newbigin writes:

"There has to be a Kenosis, a "self-emptying". The Christian does not meet his partner in dialogue as one who possesses the truth and the holiness of God but as one who bears witness to a truth and holiness which are God's judgement on him and is ready to hear the judgement spoken through the lips and life of his partner of another faith ..."<sup>54</sup>

"Much of his "Christianity" may have to be left behind in this meeting. Much of the intellectual construction, the piety, the practice in which his discipleship of Christ has been expressed may have to be called into question. The meeting place is at the cross, at the place where he bears witness to Jesus as the Judge and Saviour of both him and of his partner."<sup>55</sup>

Reconsideration and reformation of Christian doctrine will surely arise out of such an encounter. Yet none of these writers are advocating epochè. They are advocating the acceptance of crisis and risk as God's means of purifying Christian faith of any trust in any wisdom but the wisdom of the cross. (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

"A dialogue which is safe from all possible risks is not

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52. J. V. Taylor, The GoBetween God, p.190-191.

53. F. W. Dillistone, Into All the World, p.192.

54. L. Newbigin, The Open Secret, p.205.

55. Ibid., p.209.

true dialogue" asserts Newbigin.<sup>56</sup> Each meeting with a non-Christian partner in dialogue, therefore, puts at risk our own Christianity because a "real meeting with a partner of another faith must mean being so open to him that his way of looking at the world becomes a real possibility for us."<sup>57</sup> Such openness is the work of "the Creator Spirit who seems to gamble all the past gains on a new initiative inciting his creatures to such crazy adventure and risk."<sup>58</sup> "The Holy Spirit is totally primordial."<sup>59</sup> He "is quite likely to lead us into a savage and beautiful country but he will not lead us astray so long as we dare to live with the truth - our particular truth. That is our only guarantee of discernment by which we can 'test the spirits'."<sup>60</sup> The "truth" for the Christian is Jesus, crucified and risen. (1 Jn. 4:2-3). "Whatever else he is up to the Spirit always points to Jesus and makes us see him more clearly (which is not the same as saying 'in a more orthodox light')."<sup>61</sup> In summary: "The mystery of God's reign can only be made safe against all risk by being buried in the ground. It can only earn its proper profits if those to whom it is entrusted are willing to risk it in the commerce of mankind."<sup>62</sup>

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56. Ibid., p.211.

57. Ibid., p.208.

58. J. V. Taylor, The GoBetween God, p.33.

59. Ibid., p.45.

60. Ibid., p.58.

61. Ibid., p.61.

The possibility of such "commerce" was the subject of the Tambaran Conference in 1938. For the first time in missionary history, Christian revelation was viewed in its relation to revelatory phenomena in other religions. Hendrik Kraemer's monumental work, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World was written as a discussion document for the conference. The "main message of the first part of the book is that non-Christian religions (viewed as totalities) are all in various ways, when viewed in the light of the Christian revelation, attempts on man's own part to raise himself to the level of the Divine."<sup>63</sup> In contrast, there is the Biblical realism of the Christian revelation - "the Living, eternally-active God ..."<sup>64</sup> Human attempts, including Christian, to apprehend God by means of philosophy, theology, metaphysics and ethics are a revolt against the sole efficacy of God's power to act and to save, and are therefore sinful departures from Biblical realism. Only God's freely given, unique, sui generis revelation in Jesus Christ can establish man in communion with, and right relation to him, because only this revelation can bring men to true repentance and faith. "Christ, as the ultimate standard of reference, is the crisis of all religions, of the non-Christian religions and of empirical Christianity too."<sup>65</sup>

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62. L. Newbigin 'The Basis, Purpose and Manner of Inter-Faith Dialogue', in Scottish Journal of Theology, p.270.

63. E. Sharpe, Faith Meets Faith, p.93

64. Hendrick Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, p.65.

Yet H. Kraemer is not totally bound by the Barthian rejection of all natural theology. He acknowledges some measure of dialectic:

"God works in man and shines through nature. The religious and moral life of man is man's achievement, but also God's wrestling with him; it manifests a receptivity to God, but at the same time an inexcusable disobedience and blindness to God. The world fails to know God even in its highest wisdom, although it strives to do so."<sup>66</sup>

Hence, Kraemer maintains that although there are 'points of contact' between God and man in the totalities of the religions, these are not effective of real communion; in other words, "there are no bridges from human religious consciousness to the reality of Christ."<sup>67</sup>

There is ambiguity in Kraemer's view of revelation. On the one hand, he admits that God is at work in non-Christian religions, but on the other, he refuses to analyse the mode or efficacy of this activity, and certainly refuses to parallel it with Biblical realism. He asserts robustly the fact of revelation, and its sui generis nature in Christ, but will not explore its human apprehension. A. G. Hogg concluded that Kraemer's view essentially judges non-Christian faith, (as

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65. Ibid., p.110.

66. Ibid., p.126.

67. Ibid., p.132.

distinct from "faiths"), as "a seeking but not a finding, not an experience of Divine self-disclosure ...

...In non-Christian faith we may meet with something that is not merely a seeking but in real measure a finding, and a finding by contact with which a Christian may be helped to make fresh discoveries of his own finding of God in Christ."<sup>68</sup>

He continues:

"Where Christ has not yet been spiritually apprehended, there may be other ways than he to the trust in God which enables our Heavenly Father to bestow on a man some measure of communion with Himself. But when Christ succeeds in unveiling for any man the judgement of God on sin, in this very act He cannot help making Himself for that man, the one and only way."<sup>69</sup>

The 'sin' in question is man's self-assertive independence over against God's salvific love and guidance - a sin of which Christians can be guilty. Christian revelation is unique then because it reveals Jesus as the perfect human "yes" to God, not because it is the only channel of divine self-communication.

Eric Sharpe regards this latter concept of revelation as fundamental for Christian encounter. "For it makes all the difference in the world to attitudes to religions other than (and perhaps also including) one's own whether one regards them as demonic, as human, or as divine in their origin."<sup>70</sup>

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68. A. G. Hogg, 'The Christian Attitude to Non-Christian Faith', in The Tambaram Series, The Authority of the Faith, p.103.

69. Ibid., p.124.

The stance of Max Warren in this regard is worth noting:

" God has revealed Himself in diverse manners. We should be bold to insist that God was speaking in that cave in the hills outside Mecca, that God brought illumination to the man who once sat under the Bo tree ... that, indeed, the God of a hundred names is still God. Thus boldly to insist is in no way to hesitate in affirming what we believe, that in a quite unique way He revealed Himself in Jesus Christ Our Lord."<sup>71</sup>

(Warren later inclined to substituting the word 'distinctive' for 'unique'.)

The degree of reassessment of Christian theology necessitated by inter-faith encounter has varied considerably among Christian missionaries. At one end of the spectrum there has been a minimal readiness to change stance, while at the other end, there has been willingness to accept a radical shift of emphasis. P. Knitter deals comprehensively with this spectrum of re-assessment using a series of models - conservative evangelical, mainline Protestant and mainline Catholic.<sup>72</sup>

At the minimum end of the spectrum may be located the conservative evangelical response. In essence, this was spelt out in the Frankfurt Declaration of 1970. "Methodologically, it (the Declaration) stated that the "primary frame of reference" for

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70. E. Sharpe, Faith Meets Faith, p.100.

71. F. W. Dillistone, Into All the World, pp. 197-198.

72. See P. Knitter, No Other Name?, pp. 73-167.

understanding Christianity and evaluating other religions is and can only be the Bible ... "We therefore reject the false teaching that the non-Christian religions and world views are also ways of salvation similar to belief in Christ." The bottom line of the declaration is an urgent appeal to all Christians to take up their missionary obligation to all non-Christians."<sup>73</sup> There has been recent qualification of the statement in a recognition of the need for dialogue, but, only because "dialogue with other religions is necessary because you cannot convert persons without first understanding them. Dialogue, then, is valid only as a means for proclamation and conversion."<sup>74</sup>

In terms of God's absolute revelation in Jesus, the conservative evangelical response was impressively systematised by Karl Barth. For Barth, there are "two foundation pieces of the N.T. message. The first is that only God can make God known ... (and secondly) ... only God can save humankind."<sup>75</sup> Therefore Christianity (or rather, faith in Jesus) is the only true religion because "revelation and salvation are offered only in Jesus Christ ... (and) nothing is really affirmed or answered in the world of religions."<sup>76</sup> H. Kraemer, while following in the footsteps of Barth, did, as we have seen, attempt to qualify the absoluteness

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73. Ibid., pp. 78-79.

74. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

75. Ibid., p. 82-83.

76. Ibid., p.85.

of Barth's position.

A. G. Hogg and M. Warren, as representatives of the mainline Protestant response to re-assessment highlight the inadequacies of the conservative evangelical response. Human experience and reason can reveal something of God to man. Refusal of this truth "prevents a real listening, without which authentic dialogue collapses."<sup>77</sup> Instead, "where Christians encounter religions that, from all appearances, are full of good works - followers recognising the reality of a Transcendent Being and living lives of love and justice - these Christians should also expect to find God's revelation and grace. From their fruits you will know them. From their fruits other religions will attest to the presence of the Reality Christians call God."<sup>78</sup> Yet the evangelical question remains: "Is it not possible that Jesus of Nazareth might represent something thoroughly surprising, thoroughly exceptional and unique in the history of humanity?"<sup>79</sup> Mainline Protestant theologians respond by saying "that Christians not only can but must recognise that the God revealed in Jesus is truly speaking through voices other than that of Jesus."<sup>80</sup> In other words, for "adherents of other faiths to encounter the God of Jesus Christ is not to meet a stranger."<sup>81</sup> This is because

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77. Ibid., p.91.

78. Ibid., p.95.

79. Ibid., p.89.

80. Ibid., p.98.

man's experience of the ultimate reality "is somehow personal and benevolent ... (and) ... can also offer definite insight into the insufficiency of the human condition and into the human need for redemption."<sup>82</sup>

However, even where human experience and reason can lead to a certain revealing of the God of Jesus, for mainline Protestant theologians, human effort can never lead to salvation. "First, there is in all followers of other religions an ineluctable tendency to effect their own salvation - that is, to try to force God's hand, to establish their own worthiness ... they try to work out their own salvation, and to do so puts it out of reach. Thus, if other faiths are called religions of salvation, the term must apply only to their search, not to their discovery."<sup>83</sup> This is because some "form of idolatry rears its head in all religions."<sup>84</sup> Here, we are back to Newbigin's perspective of an "epistemological necessity of Christ"<sup>85</sup> and of his cross. "The cross exposes "us as the beloved of God who are, in our own highest religion, the enemies of God".<sup>86</sup> Therefore, "in "fulfilling" other religions, Christianity replaces them. The

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81. Ibid., p.100.

82. Ibid., p.100.

83. Ibid., p.102. See, however, note 68 in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

84. P. Knitter, No Other Name?, p.103.

85. Ibid., p.110.

86. Ibid., p.110.

religions can be seen only as negative preparations for the gospel."<sup>87</sup>

There are certain inadequacies evident in the mainline Protestant response to reassessment. Clearly, "what kind of a God is this who offers a revelation that can never lead to salvation, to an authentic experience of the divine? ... How can we take seriously God's love and desire to save all persons when that saving love is tied so exclusively to one channel?"<sup>88</sup> The mainline Catholic model of re-assessment seeks to grapple more courageously with these questions.

For contemporary Catholic theologians, "Vatican II clearly teaches - or at least implies - that authentic "religious experience" takes place in and through the religions."<sup>89</sup> Karl Rahner at the time of the Vatican Council in 1961 insisted that "the non-Christian religious can be " a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation".<sup>90</sup> Yet even the Catholic model has its limits and reservations. Even though Catholic theologians "no longer wish to assert that Christ is the constitutive cause of all

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87. Ibid., p.110.

88. Ibid., pp. 116-117.

89. Ibid., p.124.

90. Ibid., p.127.

salvation, even though they do not try to claim for the church any example of saving grace outside the church, they still continue to hold up Christ and the church as normative for whatever revelation and grace are found throughout history."<sup>91</sup>

"There is, then, a fundamental point of agreement between the Catholic and the mainline Protestant models. Whereas mainline Protestants, for the most part, view the religions as a negative preparation for the gospel, Catholics see them as a positive preparation."<sup>92</sup>

This means that all Christians see God's grace in Christ as normative. As a pre-supposition within interfaith encounter, such normativity means that Christians "bring to the dialogue religious claims that are not only universally, but definitively and normatively, relevant."<sup>93</sup> It means that Christian missionary theology is, in effect, Christology.

Specific application of these models - conservative evangelical, mainline Protestant and mainline Catholic - to Christian-Muslim relations has produced the following results. In 1978, the American Evangelical Churches held a North American Conference on Muslim Evangelisation. Leaders made an appeal for cultural adaptation to Muslims in Muslim lands.

"He (Paul) made Christ incarnate in Jew-like form to lead

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91. Ibid., p.133.

92. Ibid., p.135.

93. Ibid., p.142.

them, and Christ incarnate in Gentile-like form to reach them. Dare we follow the train of Jesus and Paul and say, "Christ incarnate in Muslim-like form to reach them?"<sup>94</sup>

Dialogue is to be used as a means of conversion to Christ, but certainly not as an end in itself. There is to be careful listening, but no yielding of the centrality and normativity of Christ for salvation.

An example of the mainline Protestant model vis-a-vis Muslims is the work of Kenneth Cragg. Here, not only are the cultural values of Muslims respected, but also the great spiritual wealth inherent in Islam. On the foundation of such an appreciation he builds, for the Muslim, an interpretation of Christian faith in five parts: "the Christian Scriptures, the Person of Jesus, the Cross, the Christian Doctrine of God, and the Christian Church and a Christian Society."<sup>95</sup> Yet here again, the normative role of Christ for revelation and salvation operates as a decisive pre-supposition.

The Roman Catholic approach to Muslims has been formulated by Council documents and declarations from Rome. In the 'Conciliar Declaration' on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Islam is counted within the history of

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94. Bashir Abdol Massih, 'The Incarnational Witness to the Muslim Heart', in Don M. McCurry, ed. The Gospel and Islam, p.87.

95. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.275. See the whole of the chapter on "The Call to Interpretation."

salvation as first among non-Christian monotheistic religions.<sup>96</sup> Muslims are recognised as spiritual descendants of Abraham just as are Christians and Jews. With such a common heritage, the past of Muslim-Christian relations is to be deplored. "Thus, the Council Fathers had the honesty to recognise that many quarrels and dissensions had arisen throughout the history of Muslim-Christian relations. Without making pronouncement as to their causes, expressions or consequences, the Council chose to urge both sides to forget the past."<sup>97</sup> The Catholic position can be summed up as follows: "Without overlooking the fact that he himself has to give an account of his faith and bear witness that Jesus is the perfect revelation of God, the Christian should be able to enter into a personal relationship with the Muslim and to appreciate all values of faith the Muslim cultivates in the framework of Islam."<sup>98</sup> Again, in the final analysis, the centrality and normativity of Jesus Christ is pre-supposed.

Christian religious pre-suppositions within interfaith encounter may be summarised then as follows: firstly, Christians are called to create unity among the religions of the world in response to Christ's command; secondly, they are called to be present to all men in a Christ-like way, and thirdly, they are called to bear witness before all men to the good news of Jesus

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96. See Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin, p.12.

97. Ibid., p.13.

98. Ibid., p.16.

Christ as Son, Lord and Saviour.

We turn, then, to Muslim religious pre-suppositions within encounter. The first of these is that Islam is the true religion in the sense that it is the perfection and correction of all other forms of religious expression and experience. These other forms have, indeed, been provided by God. "Without the 'dictum of heaven', without revelation in its universal sense, no religion is possible and man cannot attach himself to God without God having himself through His grace provided the means for man to do so."<sup>99</sup> But Islam is both the primordial religion and the last one.

"By re-affirming what all the prophets have asserted over the ages Islam emphasised its universal character as the primordial religion and by considering itself as the last religion, a claim by the way which in fact no other orthodox religion before Islam had ever made, Islam attained its particularity which distinguishes it and gives it its special form as a religion."<sup>100</sup>

The primordial nature of Islam arises out of the fact that it claimed to be rooted in the true religion revealed to Abraham - viz. absolute monotheism. The religion proclaimed by Abraham, it was asserted, was the true religion of God in its purity and simplicity. It was identical with the religion preached by all the prophets, including Muhammad."<sup>101</sup> "Thus Islam appeared, not

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99. Sayyid Hossein Nasir, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.16.

100. Ibid., p.35.

101. W. M. Watt, Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman, p.115.

as a new religion, but as a revival of pure Abrahamic monotheism, purified at once of the accretions of Judaism and Christianity and superseding them as the final revelation."<sup>102</sup>

As the primordial and last religion, Islam is seen by Muslims to be the only religion truly natural to man. This is because Islam challenges and satisfies the two greatest faculties in man - his intelligence and will. By his intelligence man can discern the truth of monotheism, and by his will he can choose to live according to its dictates.

"Islam asks what is intelligence and what is its real nature. The real nature of intelligence is ultimately to come to realise that La iloha ill' Allah, that is to come to know that in the end there is only one Absolute Reality. It is to realise the absolute nature of Allah and the relativity of all else that is other than He. Moreover, it is only this truth which the intelligence can know in an absolute sense. Everything else it knows only relatively. Only this certainty belongs to the very nature of man. It is only this knowledge which man can attain with absolute certitude.

What is the nature of will? It is to be able to choose, to choose freely between two alternatives, between the real and the unreal, between the true and the false, between the Absolute and the Relative."<sup>103</sup>

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102. H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, p.47. See also W. M. Watt; "The chief point made in the Qur'an was that Islam is the religion of Abraham in its purity, and that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, since he had lived before the revelation of the Torah to Moses or the Gospel to Jesus." Islam and Christianity Today, p.2.
103. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.19. Nasr notes: "It is very significant that the loss of faith is equated in Quranic language not with the corruption of the will but with the improper functioning of intelligence." p.21. And further on: "In Islam, ..., it is man who is veiled from God. The Divine Being is not veiled from us, we

"The very idea of Islam is that through the use of intelligence which discerns between the Absolute and the relative one should come to surrender to the Will of the Absolute. This is the meaning of Muslim: one who has accepted through free choice to conform his will to the Divine Will."<sup>104</sup>

Because Islam as the true religion is wholly natural to man, it alone can create the human integrity which is man's destiny. Thus, "the Qur'anic conception of the human person is monistic in the sense that, where the distinction between soul and body was accepted, it was seen as only relative, and the body was regarded as being of the essence of the person just as much as the soul."<sup>105</sup> Islam, then, "is simply a programme of life according to the rules of Nature which God has decreed upon His creation; and its supreme achievement is the complete co-ordination of the spiritual and the material aspects of human life. In the teachings of Islam, both these aspects are not only 'reconciled' to each other in the sense of leaving no inherent conflict between the bodily and the moral existence of man, but the fact of their co-existence and actual inseparability is insisted upon as the natural basis of life."<sup>106</sup>

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are veiled from Him and it is for us to try to rend this veil asunder, to try to know God ... Islam is thus essentially a way of knowledge; it is a way of gnosis (ma'rifah)." pp. 21-22.

104. Ibid., p.27.

105. W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.127.

106. M. Asad, "The Spirit of Islam", in K. Ahmad, ed. Islam: Its Meaning and Message, p.48.

"Islam came to unify all powers and abilities, to fuse together spiritual aspirations and bodily desires, and to harmonise their directions, and thus to create comprehensive unity in the universe, life and man. Its aim was to unite earth and Heaven in the system of the world, to join the present world and the Hereafter in the doctrines of the faith; to link spirit and body in the person of man; to correlate worship and work in the system of life. It sought to bring all these into one path - the path which led to God. It aimed at subjecting all these to one authority - the authority of God."<sup>107</sup>

It follows, then, that since Islam is the primordial and last religion, and the one that can ensure the integration of human life, it must be made known to all men. However, the "basic principle as the Qur'ān says, is that "There is no compulsion in religion". Far from implying a lethargy and indifference, a perpetual and disinterested struggle is thereby imposed to persuade others for the will-foundedness of Islam."<sup>108</sup>

The true religion, Islam, was restored and finally

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107. Syed Qutb, 'Islamic Approach to Social Justice', *ibid.*, p.123. K. Cragg writes of "a sense of totality in religion evident in the familiar refusal of the classical Muslim mind to differentiate between sacred and secular." The Call of the Minaret, p.46. See also Isma'il al Faruqi; "Religion itself ... is not an act (the act of faith or encounter with God, or of participation), but a dimension of every act. It is not a thing; but a perspective with which everything is invested."; 'History of Religions', in Numen, p.37.
108. Dr Muhammad Hammidullah, Introduction to Islam, p.115. Islam "prohibits all compulsion in the matter of religious belief; and however unbelievable it may sound, is under the self-imposed religious dogmatic duty of giving autonomy to the non-Muslims residing on the soil of the Islamic State. The Qur'an, the hadith and the practice of all time demand that non-Muslims should have their own laws, administered in their own tribunals by their own judges, without any interference on the part of the Muslim authorities whether it be in religious matters or social." *Ibid.*, p.49.

established through Prophet Muhammad, the last and the greatest of the prophets. "Man needs revelation because although a theomorphic being he is by nature negligent and forgetful; he is by nature imperfect. Therefore he needs to be reminded. Adam, the first man, was also the first of prophets. Prophecy is thus necessary for mankind and begins with the first man himself. As Adam needed prophecy so do all men who are his progeny. Man cannot alone uplift himself spiritually. He must be awakened from the dream of negligence by one who is already awake."<sup>109</sup>

Muhammad, "the prophet of Islam is the prototype and perfect embodiment of prophecy and so in a profound sense is the prophet."<sup>110</sup> "One could in fact say that of the major elements of Islam the real significance of the Prophet is the least understood to non-Muslims and especially to Occidentals."<sup>111</sup> "In Islam, when one thinks of the Prophet who is to be emulated, it is the image of a strong personality that comes to mind who is severe with

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109. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.22.

110. Ibid., p.67

111. Ibid., p.69. K. Cragg notes that Western judgements of Muhammad have been founded upon too little an appreciation of his virtues within the context of his age. "Too much and too little is then made of him. Too much, it may be, of plural marriages and too little of their political, and other, significance and of Muhammad's devotion to Khadijah; too much of the opportunist tactics, too little of the unswerving singleness of mind; too much of the tribal confusions and repressive measures, too little of the solicitude for orphans and magnanimity to certain foes; too much of his ruthlessness, too little of the hypocrites and false dealers with whom the Qur'an affirms he was often surrounded. It may be that, conversely, too much is made of Muhammad's circumstances and too little of his obligations to the absolutes of every age." The Call of the Minaret, p.92.

himself and with the false and the unjust and charitable towards the world that surrounds him."<sup>112</sup>

The true nature of Muhammad's prophethood is to be seen in the fact that he, an unlettered man, was chosen to be the vehicle through whom the definitive revelation of God - the Qur'ān - was given to the world of man.

"The Word of God in Islam is the Quran; in Christianity it is Christ. The vehicle of the Divine Message in Christianity is the Virgin Mary; in Islam it is the soul of the Prophet. The Prophet must be unlettered for the same reason that the Virgin Mary must be a virgin. The human vehicle of a Divine Message must be pure and untainted. The Divine Word can only be written on the pure and 'untouched' tablet of human receptivity. If this Word is in the form of flesh the purity is symbolised by the virginity of the mother who gives birth to the Word, and if it is in the form of a book this purity is symbolised by the unlettered nature of the person who is chosen to announce this Word among men. One could not with any logic reject the unlettered nature of the Prophet and in the same breath defend the virginity of Mary. Both symbolise a profound aspect of the mystery of revelation and once understood one cannot be accepted and the other rejected."<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, not only is Muhammad the vehicle of the Qur'ān, but also of the wisdom required to apply its principles.

"According to the Koran itself the Prophet was possessed not only of the Kitab, the written 'book', but also of the hikma, the

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112. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.75. "The one certain fact is that his (Muhammad's) impulse was religious through and through. From the beginning of his career as a preacher his outlook and his judgement of persons and events were dominated by his conceptions of God's government and purposes in the world of man." H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, p.24.

113. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, pp. 43-44.

'wisdom' whereby ultimate principles can be applied to the details and episodes of ordinary life. Consequently, his actions and sayings, transmitted by chains of reliable narrators, form a kind of commentary and supplement to the Koran."<sup>114</sup>

As the true religion, the primordial and the last, Islam is not only possessed of the Prophet sent to mankind, but also, through Muhammad, of the revelation. "Islam was the faith about God to end gods. It was the revelation to finalise revelation. It was the call, in rugged simplicity, to let God be God."<sup>115</sup>

This call - heard five times a day from the Minaret - was heard first in the soul of the Prophet, and then offered to men as God's final revelation. For Muhammad "is the fulfilment of the promise to the People of the Book, and the Apostle whom Abraham had prayed might be raised up, ... he is the final link in the prophetic succession, and ipso facto his Scripture the final revelation for mankind."<sup>116</sup>

"It is thus clear that as Muhammad claimed to be in the succession of the earlier Prophets as messengers called to summon men to the "way of God", so his Book, the Qur'an is

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114. H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, p.92. "Through the Hadith and Sunnah Muslims come to know both the Prophet and the message of the Quran. Without Hadith much of the Quran would be a closed book. We are told in the Quran to pray but were it not for prophetic Sunnah we would not know how to pray." S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.83.
115. K. Cragg, The Event of the Qur'an, p.14.
116. Arther Jeffery, The Qur'an as Scripture, p.78.

considered to be in the succession of earlier Scriptures which men read to find what has been revealed from heaven as to that "way of God".<sup>117</sup>

The Qur'ān, then, is the speech of God explaining the way of God. "Muslims do not read the Qur'an and conclude that it is divine; rather, they believe it to be divine, and then read it."<sup>118</sup> However, it is important to note "that though the Qur'an is the speech of God, it is not God."<sup>119</sup> "The revelation is conceived of, not as a communication of the Divine Being, but only of the Divine will. It is a revelation, that is, of law not of personality. God the Revealer remains Himself unrevealed. The Qur'an is a guidance for mankind. It brings that which men need to know in order to relate themselves to God as His slaves."<sup>120</sup>

"The Qur'anic conception of the relation of the human race to God is dominated by two words, 'abd and rabb. In relation to God a human being is an 'abd or 'slave', while God is the rabb, usually translated 'lord' but perhaps connoting rather something more august such as 'sovereign'. The service or worship of God is 'ibada, an abstract noun corresponding to 'abd. This general conception further implied that there was a great gulf between humanity and divinity, so that the latter completely transcended the former and no created being resembled God."<sup>121</sup>

Thus, the "aim of the Koran is to present a perfect

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117. Ibid., p.68.

118. W. C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p.291.

119. Abd Al Karim A Khatib, 'Christ in the Qur'an, the Tauret and the Injil', in The Muslim World, p.98.

120. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.47.

121. W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.125.

transcendental vision of God ..."<sup>122</sup> "It says that God possesses all the attributes which man can conceive for him. He is the Living, the All Powerful, the Creator, the Merciful, the All Seeing, All Hearing, All Knowing and so on ... (But) ... His 'living' is not like our living, His 'Providence' is not like our providence, His 'seeing' or 'hearing' or 'knowing' is not like ours ... the sense is not the same as may be formed of them in our mind in respect of their relation to human activity."<sup>123</sup>

The Qur'ān teaches the way of God by insisting that God must be accorded absolute sovereignty above all others and all else, and that man must live his life in submission to God's sovereignty. It therefore, "contains a doctrine about human life, about history, about existence as such and its meaning. It bears all the teachings necessary for man to know who he is, where he is and where he should be going."<sup>124</sup> The Qur'ān is therefore timeless in its application to man's situation in the world.<sup>125</sup>

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122. Abdul Kalam Azad, in A. Ahmad ed., Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan, p.125.

123. Ibid., p.126.

124. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.51.

125. A modern Muslim writer lists the values of 20th century man - equality, brotherhood, education, religious tolerance, liberation, dignity, racial integration, justice etc. and concludes: "Each one of these items on the agenda of modern man's heroic and noble endeavours, I submit, is fully and adequately supported by various injunctions of the Qur'an ...". Allahbakhsh K. Brohi, 'The Qur'an and its Impact on Human History', in K. Ahmad, ed. Islam: Its Meaning and Message, p. 88-89.

The importance of the Qur'ān to Muslims is that it is the Book in human history. "In the continuity of its reception since the event we have perhaps the largest and most sustained expression of what might be called documentary faith. Throughout we have to do with revelation as literature and with literature as revelation."<sup>126</sup> As a piece of literature, the Qur'ān must rank among the highest achievements of human language, yet its real power goes far beyond that of literary expression.

"The text of the Quran reveals human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. It is as if human language were scattered into a thousand fragments like a wave scattered into drops against the rock at sea. One feels through the shattering effect left upon the language of the Quran, the power of the Divine whence it originated."<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, it "is meaningless to criticise it because one cannot either accept its literal description or understand the profound symbolism involved."<sup>128</sup>

The way of God enjoined in the Qur'ān - the straight path - is that man's whole existence must become one of worship towards the Divine Sovereignty. "The basis of 'ibādah,(worship) is the fact that human beings are creatures and thus bond-servants of God, their Creator and their Lord, to Whom they are destined to return. Thus man's turning towards God, in intimate communion,

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126. K. Cragg, The Event of the Qur'an, p.13.

127. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.47.

128. Ibid., p.56.

reverence, and in the spirit of devotion and humble submission, is termed 'ibadah."<sup>129</sup>

Yet, even perfectly performed worship does not qualify the absolute sovereignty of God, it does not place God under any obligation towards His servants. "Fulfilment of the ritual obligation in Islam does qualify God's favour, but gives no ground for presumption about its being granted. This is the striking feature that should never be overlooked. It arises perhaps from Muslim sense of the sovereignty of God's will, in that favour can never be presumed."<sup>130</sup>

Further, true worship must be performed from the heart. It cannot qualify if it is empty ritual, if it is devoid of Iman, i.e. faith in the Unity. "Iman is the counterpart of Din, and the two definitively, make up Islam: the thing believed and the thing performed. Din stands on its famous Five Pillars ... that is, confession, worship, alms, fasting and pilgrimage. Iman, on which all these acts are based, articulates and amplifies the content of the first, namely confession."<sup>131</sup> Thus, there is an important

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129. Mustafa Ahmad al-Zarqa, 'The Islamic Concept of Worship', in K. Ahmad, ed. Islam: Its Meaning and Message, p.111.

130. K. Cragg, The Dome and the Rock, p.17. "The infinite distance separating the believer from his God can never be bridged, for worship is but service, faith is but witness, and life is but submission. Such is the strange and fascinating greatness of a transcendence that refuses man any intimacy with God yet allows him to be great enough to be his witness for ever." Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin, p.7.

131. K. Cragg, The Dome and the Rock, p.105.

inner and spiritual meaning to each of the Five Pillars. "The salat means to awaken from one's dream of forgetfulness and remember God always, the fast means to die to one's passionate self and be born in purity, the pilgrimage means to journey from the surface to the centre of one's being for, as so many Sufis have said, the heart is the spiritual Ka'bah. The zakat also implies spiritual generosity and nobility."<sup>132</sup>

Finally, in true worship, man is called to exercise his greatest gifts - freedom and responsibility. "The peculiarity that distinguishes man from other existing beings is not that he occupies space or that he takes in breath or that he reproduces himself. Rather the distinguishing peculiarity that makes him not only an independent type of being but the Khalifa of God in the earth is his power of moral choice and his moral responsibility."<sup>133</sup>

It is chiefly in his attitude towards and use of the created order that man proves his moral responsibility and the genuineness

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132. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.117.

133. Abdul'l-A'la Maududi, 'The Moral Foundations of the Islamic Movement', in A. Ahmad ed. Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan, p.162. When man's power of moral choice is submitted through worship to the Divine Will, then man becomes God's greatest witness on earth - "... a theomorphic being who as the vicegerent (Khalifah) of God on earth is the central theophany (tajalli) of God's Names and Qualities. There is something God-like in man as attested to by the Quranic statement, (Pickthall translation): 'I have made him and have breathed into him my spirit' (Quran XV 29)." S. H. Nasr, Ideal and Realities of Islam, p.18.

of his worship. "Man's response to nature in its wonder leads to man's trusteeship of nature in its wealth. Both are central to the meaning of worship, which is both reverent gratitude for what is and grateful reverence in the use of it."<sup>134</sup> Through worship, man comes to recognise the plan of God in every detail of creation, and to respect its workings.

"To visualise God as Rabb al-Amin or the Rabb of all creation is to conceive of Him as not only the Creator of everything in the universe but its nourisher and its sustainer as well. The provision and growth of everything is made under a plan, so marvellous that every being is furnished with all that its particular nature demands for its existence, and at the same time, it is furnished in a manner that takes cognizance of every changing situation and need."<sup>135</sup>

Respect for each man's freedom of choice and moral responsibility within the plan of God means that each individual must account for his own actions and shortcomings before God.

"The Koran in its simple, forceful manner emphasises the individuality and uniqueness of man, and has ... a definite view of his destiny as a unity of life. It is in consequence of this view of man as a unique individuality which makes it impossible for one individual to bear the burden of another, and entitles him only to what is due to his own personal effort, that the Koran is led to reject the idea of redemption."<sup>136</sup>

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134. K. Cragg, The Dome and the Rock, pp. 119-120.

135. A. K. Azad, see A. Ahmad ed. Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan, p.120.

136. Muhammad Iqbal, 'Selections from The Reconstruction of Religious Thought', in Ibid., p.140. "Redemption and

However, respect for the dignity of man's moral freedom never raises man to the level of opposing God on equal terms. If man chooses to be sinful, it is only with the Divine permission.

"In its discussion of Adam as the archetypal man, the Quran does not see him as rebellious. For that would be to enlarge his stature over against God. It sees him rather as weak and forgetful, or lacking in firmness and resolve ... When the stubborn recalcitrance of the unbelievers appears like a calculated defiance of God, it is understood rather as a delusion possible only by the Divine permission and as the prelude to their condemnation."<sup>137</sup>

It is because man is weak and easily led astray that he needs the firm foundation of community, and the clear structures of a system of law. This is the second major religious presupposition for Muslims within inter-faith encounters. Since Islam is the primordial and last religion, the only true one which integrates the life of man and perfects his powers of moral choice and social responsibility, then it follows that Islam serves to bring about true human community.

"These uncompromising monotheistic believers together constitute a maternal community, umma, (umm signifies "mother"), which forms them, nourishes them, imbues them with its spirit, controls them and inspires them: this is Islam, a unitary society whose members all feel themselves without exception to be brethren, united one with another despite differences of race, language and civilization."<sup>138</sup>

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damnation are individual. Every Muslim is his own redeemer; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his heart." M. Asad, 'The Spirit of Islam', in K. Ahmad, ed. Islam: Its Meaning and Message, p.53.

137. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.46.

The great symbol of the umma, of Muslim humanity united in worship and in striving after good is Hajj. "Ihram is an experience in brotherhood, an admonition for past disunity, and a promise and a demonstration of what Islam can become when we are united ... for the glory of God and the betterment of all men."<sup>139</sup>

Muslim conviction is that the whole of humanity is called and destined to be one vast umma, one single brotherhood in the Unity - faith in the Divine Unity, and unity in the living of that faith. But that destiny is as yet unfulfilled. There are many who do not belong to the household of Islam, - the community of the true religion and the true life.

"Dar al Islam and Dar al Harb is a fundamental distinction running through all humanity; the household of submission to God and the household of non-Islam still to be brought into such submission. The militancy which for long attached to the division has been reinterpreted in many quarters. But the sense of "otherness" abides. The household of Islam is aware of itself as a community which belongs together and does not belong elsewhere."<sup>140</sup>

The well-being, advancement and good ordering of the household of Islam is of the highest importance to Muslims. It is

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138. Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin, p.2.

139. Ahmad Kamal, The Sacred Journey, p.20.

140. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.189. "The Muslim feels himself part of a chosen people, in that to him and his has come the supreme favour of God. He is not among the mushrikun and the kafirun, the idolaters and the unbelievers." Ibid., p.204.

an essential element in the call of the muezzin. "Al-Falah. "Come ye unto the Good" it cries ... Falah is not ...some pietistic abstraction, nor the indulgence of a private sanctity. It is the true state of welfare, the proper prosperity, of the people of God, fulfilled in communal existence and realized in social life. ... "Alert yourselves in mind and will to the authentic well-being of Muslim humanity, achieved within the Islamic order." Such is Falah as the muezzin proclaims and defines it."<sup>141</sup>

But if Islamic order and well-being is of primary concern, then so also is the law upon which it is founded. "The true law in the custody of the true community is the condition of the true society. The ideal state of affairs, the muezzin's Falah, demands the proper ideology under the proper conditions. The law which defines the one also establishes the other."<sup>142</sup>

The defining of a proper ideology was achieved in the Qur'ān and the Sunna.

"These two, the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet ... are the ultimate authorities for all true Muslims in every question that may concern either their individual or their collective lives. When the Quran and the Prophet speak on an issue, there is no higher court of appeal, for to displease or impugn them would be an offence against the awesome majesty of God ... There is one true and unimpeachable source of law, one rightful law-giver and only

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141. Ibid., p.140.

142. Ibid., p.142.

one, who has chosen to make his shariah known through the agencies of revelation and prophecy."<sup>143</sup>

"Law is therefore in Islam an integral aspect of the revelation and not an alien element."<sup>144</sup> The revelation is the law, it is the revealing of the Will of God for men. "This is a Semitic form of the principle that 'the will of the sovereign is law,' since God is the sole head of the Community and therefore sole Legislator. Consequently, to violate the law, or even to neglect the law, is not simply to infringe a rule of social order - it is an act of religious disobedience, a sin, and involves a religious penalty."<sup>145</sup>

Only in this light can the absolute conformity to law enjoined upon the Muslim be understood.

"One's attitude toward (that) law is the central issue of human life; upon it turns the decision whether one shall submit to the divine will for the way in which life should be lived or whether he shall rebel against it and go astray into error. Submission (islam) brings in its train earthly blessing and heavenly reward while rebellion and refusal to submit produce only evil, unhappiness, and eternal punishment. Thus, the historical controversy which Islam has awakened has not had to do with whether God is the creator or not but with man's willingness or refusal to recognize him as Lord; the issue is not the control of nature but rather who shall claim the allegiance of men."<sup>146</sup>

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143. C. J. Adams, 'Maududi and the Islamic State', in J. L. Esposito, ed. Voices of Resurgent Islam, p.112.
144. S. H. Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p.95.
145. H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, p.99.
146. C. J. Adams, 'Maududi and the Islamic State', in J. L. Esposito, ed. Voices of Resurgent Islam, p.112.

So, the shar'iah not only defines the right way of living, it also, through enjoining submission, establishes the right ordering of life. Ideally, therefore, the whole ideology can be founded only upon the principle of political sovereignty. "It is in community, in political expression and political sovereignty, that Islam is realizable."<sup>147</sup>

Political sovereignty establishes the law of God. And the collective power which is created by political sovereignty ensures its preservation.

"Pay careful attention; why is it that the Koran and the hadith give so much emphasis to the necessity of forming a community and to hearing and obeying - so much so, that if anyone elects to leave the community, his death becomes obligatory even though he professes the unity of God and practices the prayer? Is the reason not this, and only this, that the true purpose of religion is righteous leadership and the erection and preservation of the system of truth? And does not the attainment of this purpose imply collective power, so that he who causes the loss of collective power is guilty of a crime such that neither the performance of prayers nor the profession of God's unity may compensate for it?"<sup>148</sup>

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147. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.142.

148. A. Maududi, 'The Moral Foundation of the Islamic Movement', in A. Ahmad ed. Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan, p.160. A Muslim critique of the principle of collective power, or 'consensus of the community' - Ijma - is offered in Hussein M. Kamel, City of Wrong. The book is a fictional treatment of the events of Good Friday. K. Cragg observed in the Introduction: "'Not agreeing on an error' (the idea which lies at the heart of the Islamic appeal to the safety of numbers, the validity of what the whole approves, hereby being misguided individualisation, and orthodoxy that which the collective whole adopts) is used at the very point where the mob rushes into the hall of assembly and brusquely cuts short any private misgivings that falter and hesitate about

A third Muslim religious pre-supposition operative within encounter is that other religious systems, while good in themselves and part of God's revelatory plan, are nevertheless imperfect in truth because they fall short of the perfection of Islam. The lack of perfection is due to some kind of falsification of Truth.

"Islam does not deny truth to other religions but says that later followers adulterated that Truth by their own inventions and that was why God sent Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to purify God's religion. Each religion manifests some aspect of the same Truth, but the emphasis may differ according to the need of man of that period or age or race. Islam is the religion for all and as it is the most comprehensive manifestation of that Truth, it provides a complete way and a perfect equilibrium."<sup>149</sup>

These judgements "reflect the basic Muslim view of other religions as deviations from the one primordial religion, and the actual reality of other religious beliefs is subordinated a priori to some primary categories. Buddhists are sceptics, Brahmins are rationalists who deny prophecy, the Jahiliyya was pure idolatry, Christians are tritheists, Mazadeous and Manichaeans are

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the popular verdict against Jesus. It is hardly a context which does credit to the principle." p.xvii.

149. The Islamic Foundation; England, 'Islam: The Essentials', in K. Ahmad, ed. Islam: Its Meaning and Message, p.26. The Qur'an "announced in very clear terms that its call was but to proclaim that all religions were true and that their followers had disregarded the truth which they embodied. Should they return to this forgotten truth, the task of the Koran was fulfilled. The act will be regarded as indeed the acceptance of the Koran. The truth common to all of them was but what it calls Din or Islam." A. K. Azad, see A. Ahmad ed. Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan, p.129.

dualists. These names and concepts qualify reality and the reality of these religions is first predicated before being investigated."<sup>150</sup>

In regard to Muslim assessments and judgements of Christian truth, fabrication is alleged on two main scores: scripture and doctrine.

Muslims understand scripture as the accurate, personally written record of the messages of the prophets. From this perspective, the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān are scriptures. Muslims "are instructed that they must believe in the earlier Scripture revelations as well as in what has been "sent down" to Muhammad ..."<sup>151</sup> The problem with the Gospel of Jesus, or Injil, is that the original has been either lost,<sup>152</sup> or totally corrupted by later Christians.

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150. Jacques Waardenburg, 'World Religions in the Light of Islam', in A. Welch ed. Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, p. (265). However, J. Waardenburg notes also in his article that Muslim judgements have "the same provincial character which is striking in so many Christian opinions too about other religions, so that on this score these religions are on the same footing." Ibid., p. (269).

151. A. Jeffery, The Qur'an as Scripture, p.70.

152. Abd Al Karim Al Khatib writes: "As a Muslim I believe that a heavenly - not human - book, the Injil, was received by the Christ from God. Where is this sacred text?", 'Christ in the Qur'an, the Tauret and the Injil', in The Muslim World, p.95. Louis Bevan-Jones points out that "Jesus is supposed, by some, to have taken the "Gospel" with Him at His Ascension", The People of the Mosque, p.103.

The popular Muslim belief in tahrīf - the Jewish and Christian corruption of their scriptures - is based upon a certain attitude towards and interpretation of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is the only and supreme example of pure scripture in that it is the accurately preserved record of the Prophet's message originating from the Prophet himself.<sup>153</sup> Further, the Prophet's message is "intended to make clear what had been sent down to previous messengers ... clearing up for the people of the earlier religious communities those matters about which they differ ... (so that) ... the people of knowledge among those earlier communities recognise in his message the promise of their Lord ..."<sup>154</sup> In other words, Muhammad went back to "Abraham from whom both Jesus and Christians derived, but from whose teaching both must manifestly have departed, and interprets his religion as a restoration of the 'faith of Abraham'."<sup>155</sup> "This, in effect, reduces the professed 'belief in the books of God' to belief in one book only."<sup>156</sup>

Given the supreme authority of the Qur'ān, then, the doctrine of tahrīf is founded upon a specific interpretation of

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153. K. Cragg points out that we have "to help the Muslim conceive of a Divine revelation that is primarily personal, not oracular; that proceeds by enabling not overriding the minds of its writers; and that gathers into its written "word" the comprehension of the hearing of the Word Incarnate", The Call of the Minaret, p.277.
154. A. Jeffery, The Qur'ān as Scripture, p.70.
155. Ibid., p.76.
156. L. Bevan Jones, The People of the Mosque. p.103.

certain passages.

" ... the Qur'an speaks here and there in very high terms about the Scriptures ... Bearing these passages in mind we may turn now to consider other verses on which Muslims are wont to base their charge that the Scriptures have been corrupted. The Arabic at the places cited yields such meanings as the following: (1) vii. 162: "the ungodly ones among them changed that word into another than that which had been told them." ... (2) iii. 72: "Some are there among them who torture the Scriptures with their tongues, in order that ye may suppose it to be from the Scripture, yet it is not from the Scripture." (3) ii. 73: "Woe to those who with their own hands transcribe the Book (i.e. corruptly) and then say, 'This is from God', that they may sell it for some mean price." (4) iii. 64: "O people of the Book! Why clothe ye the truth with falsehood? Why wittingly hide the truth?" (i.e. by covering up part of the text, e.g. with the hand while reading)."<sup>157</sup>

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157. Ibid., pp. 262-263. " In reality these complaints rather prove the genuineness of the Scriptures as they existed in the time of Muhammad, for you cannot "transcribe corruptly" unless you have the correct text before you, nor can you "hide the truth" unless you have the truth ... Muhammad, in effect, accused the Jews of "changing", "hiding" and "transcribing" words, and of "twisting them with their tongues" whenever asked to read out to him passages alleged to have reference to himself ... In other words the early controversy was largely a personal one, involving the claims of Muhammad, and this aspect of it is present to the minds of many Muslims even to this day. Ignoring, or else being unaware of the true significance of the changes made in the Qur'an, such Muslims assume that the Bible once contained a number of references to Muhammad, which Jesus and Christians, at some time or other, deleted." Ibid., pp. 263-265. See also Geoffery Parrinder: "There is no suggestion in the Qur'an that the Gospel given to Jesus was different from the canonical Gospels held by Christians. This is a matter of importance, in view of later Muslim polemic. Indeed the Qur'an enjoins the 'people of the Gospel' to 'judge by what God has sent down therein'. (5, 51/47) It speaks of 'the Gospel in their possession' (7, 156/157) and urges them to follow the messenger spoken of in it. The Qur'an itself is sent down to confirm the Book which was before it, and to act as a 'protector over it'. (5, 52/48)." Jesus and the Qur'an, p.145. "Sura 29, 45/46 says: Dispute not with the People of the Book save in

The second aspect of falsification alleged by Muslims is that Christians have distorted the true doctrine about God. In so doing they have violated the Unity. The Christian doctrines in question are the Incarnation, the Trinity and the Atonement.<sup>158</sup>

"... the doctrine of the Incarnation is already a doctrine of God and is rejected by the Muslim on that ground. Islam does not so much resist the faith of Christ as "God manifest in the flesh", because it is unsuited to Christ, but rather because it is unworthy of God..."<sup>159</sup>

This stance of the Muslim is rooted in his concept of

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the fairer manner ... and say, "We believe in what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is One." Ibid., p.165. W. M. Watt offers similar considerations: "Islamic teaching about the corruption of the Scriptures is certainly based on Quranic verses, but these verses do not justify the theory of total corruption." "Thoughts on Muslim-Christian dialogue", in Hamdard Islamicus, p.24. (See Watt's article, "The Christianity criticised in the Qur'an", in The Muslim World. Finally, see also J Waardenburg, "World Religions in the Light of Islam", in A. Welch ed. Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, p. (261) ff., point 1. which deals with the Muslim accusation of "a change and forgery of textual divine revelation".

158. "It can be shown ... that (this) characteristic and long-standing prejudice of the Muslims is ostensibly directed against certain doctrines rather than against the Christian message as such." L. Bevan-Jones, The People of the Mosque, p.261.
159. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.286. It is the Muslim "jealousy for God, as they understand Him, that provokes them to denounce as blasphemy any honour paid to Christ which, in effect, makes Him to be more than man. This jealousy is rooted in the cardinal doctrine of Islam, tauhid, the Unity (of God). So that ... the offence of "associating a partner" with God (shirk) is further declared by the Qur'an to be the one unpardonable sin. "Verily, God will not forgive the union of other gods with Himself!...(iv. 51, 116)." L. B. Jones, The People of the Mosque, p.266. See also J Waardenburg, "World Religions in the Light of Islam", in A. Welch ed. Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, point 2 on pp. (261) - (262).

revelation - of how it is fitting for God to bridge the gap between Creator and creature. "It is true that the gulf is bridged, since otherwise neither revelation nor religion would be feasible. But God bridges it by intermediaries - by archangels and angels, by prophets and teachers who are the means of His sending down of law and guidance for mankind. He does not bridge it of Himself. He sends rather than comes. He gives rather than brings. To conceive of God in Christ is for the Muslim mind an unworthy thing. God does not become man. If He did, something unthinkable would have happened to His Divinity. Muslims have resisted the Christian interpretation of Christ on these grounds in the belief that they are safeguarding the Divine majesty."<sup>160</sup>

And so:

"Muslims give another answer to the question, 'Who do men say that I am?' What is to be noted here is that Muslims formulate their answer in a way that makes further discussion difficult. To begin with they state that men have advanced various claims about Jesus. But what men say about Jesus is of little importance when compared with what God himself has revealed about Jesus. What God has revealed about Jesus is contained in the Qur'an. One might say that the beginnings of Muslim Christology lie in the vigorous repudiation of both Jewish and Christian interpretations of the person and ministry of Jesus. Jews and Christians alike have mis-understood (at best) or distorted (at worst) the truth about Jesus, which is finally revealed to all who will hear the Word of God in the Qur'an. The truth about Jesus, from the Islamic point of view, is that he was a human being, with no claims to divine status. He was a messenger, rasul, of God. Even then, this did not make him unique, because God sent other messengers, of whom the greatest and the last was Muhammad."<sup>161</sup>

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160. K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, pp. 291-292.

Thus:

"Islam teaches that Jesus was a Muslim, and an exemplary one. They insist that in claiming Jesus for themselves in any particular sense, Jews and Christians alike are in error. For them, and by implication for everyone else as well, the Qur'an makes the position clear."<sup>162</sup>

"The Qur'an gives a greater number of honourable titles to Jesus than any other figure of the past. He is a 'sign', a 'mercy', a 'witness' and an 'example'. He is called by his proper name Jesus, by the titles Messiah (Christ) and Son of Mary, and by the names Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God. The Qur'an gives two accounts of the annunciation and birth of Jesus and refers to his teachings and healings, and his death and exaltation. Three chapters or suras of the Qur'an are named after references to Jesus (3, 5 and 19); he is mentioned in fifteen suras and ninety-three verses. Jesus is always spoken of in the Qur'an with reverence; there is no breath of criticism, for he is the Christ of God."<sup>163</sup>

However, the title Messiah (Christ) is not possessed of its Christian connotations. "While no explanation is offered of the title Messiah, and it is applied to Jesus at all periods of his life from birth to exaltation, yet it appears to have a particular sense. 'O People of the Book, do not go beyond bounds in your religion, and do not say about God anything but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only the messenger of God.' (4, 169/171)."<sup>164</sup>

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161. Edward Hulmes, "Christian Approaches to Other Faiths", in unpublished lecture notes, Durham University, p.1.

162. Ibid., p.2.

163. G. Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'ān, p.16.

164. Ibid., p.30.

Nevertheless, Jesus plays a unique rôle in the history of prophecy. "In him there is an originality of being that is akin to that of Adam. In him, as in Adam, the divine power over and within creation is manifested. He represents a special creation; he is the Word of God injected into the human plane of existence. Yet, like other prophets, Jesus remains a human being created by God, His servant and messenger."<sup>165</sup> "The Christ of the Qur'an is according to this theology fully human, in spite of his miraculous birth and special status. Like Adam, he is the creature of God not through the law of human generation, rather he is the object of the divine amr (Word of command). Again, in spite of his humanity, and perhaps because of it, Jesus is made the agent of divine acts through his special miracles. To him alone among the prophets God gave the power to give health to the sick, life to the dead and even to crude matter. All this he did "by God's leave".<sup>166</sup>

Muslim rejection of Christ's share in the divine nature as a doctrine that is idolatrous also means rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity for the same reason.<sup>167</sup>

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165. Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology II", in The Muslim World, p.93.

166. Ibid., p.94. Jesus "had both Gospel and Evidences. The Evidences seem to mean the miracles of Jesus, which are mentioned several times in the Qur'an, but also his teaching ... Furthermore, Jesus was supported or confirmed by the Holy Spirit." G. Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'ān, p.44.

167. "The trinitarian doctrine held by the Christians that God consists of one substance and three persons is rejected outright on the basis of the Qur'an, which denies anything

"Believe in God and His apostle and say not 'Three': (i.e. there is a Trinity) - forbear! it will be better for you. God is only one God." (iv. 169). "They surely are infidels who say, 'God is the third of three', for there is no God but one God: and if they refrain not from what they say, a grievous punishment shall light (on them)" (v 77)."<sup>168</sup>

However, when "the Qur'an is studied carefully, it will be found that it does not condemn the doctrine of the Trinity as such. What it condemns is tritheism or the belief in three gods; but this is something which the Christian Church also condemns."<sup>169</sup>

A third Christian doctrine judged by Muslims to be a falsification of truth is that of the atoning death of Christ.

"Islam differs from Christianity on two crucial points. First, it denies the divinity of Christ, but without denying his special humanity. Second, it denies the expiatory sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as a ransom for sinful humanity, but again denies neither the actual death of Christ nor his general redemptive role in human history."<sup>170</sup>

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which might infringe the oneness of God." J. Waardenburg, "World Religions in the Light of Islam", in A. Welch ed. Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, p. (262).

168. L. B. Jones, The People of the Mosque, p.270.
169. W. M. Watt, 'Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue', in Hamdard Islamicus, p.22. "The use of the word 'person' in English is particularly confusing, because the normal sense of the word now is one which appeared only about the nineteenth century and was not intended by the sixteenth-century translators. The Latin persona means "an actor's mask", or a character in a play, or a role. To avoid confusion it is often better to use the word employed by the three in Greek, namely, hypostasis." W. M. Watt, Islam and Christianity Today, p.50. See also K. Cragg, The Call of the Minaret, p.308.

Muslim beliefs concerning the death of Jesus - all based upon various interpretations of the Qur'ānic text dealing with the subject - have developed over the course of Islamic history. In the main, their purpose is to safeguard the unique dignity of Jesus as a prophet of God. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Muhammad all triumphed over their enemies. So Jesus did not suffer, but similarly triumphed through God's power.<sup>171</sup> One theory - the 'substitution theory' - asserts that a disciple, most probably Judas, was taken in the place of Jesus and crucified by mistake. "It was more appropriate to the nature of things, Divine and prophetic, that Judas should have taken His (Jesus') place - a proper end for him, a manifest outwitting of the Jews and a fitting climax for Jesus."<sup>172</sup>

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170. M. M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology II' The Muslim World, p.94. "The doctrine of original sin goes against the Quran and is logically contrary to divine justice. The belief that the sins of individually responsible people could be remitted by someone else through atonement goes against the Quranic ideas of law, justice, and man, and it conflicts with reason." J. Waardenburg, "World Religions in the Light of Islam", in A. Welch ed. Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge, p. (262). The Qur'anic declaration that there is no need of any atonement "can be summarised very briefly as follows:

Allah is Almighty - He can do what He likes.

Allah is merciful - He forgives whom He will."

L. B. Jones, The People of the Mosque, p.274.

171. K. Cragg notes from the Christian side - "... the situations of Jesus in Jerusalem and Muhammad in Mecca are in some measures analogous. Both faced an opposition to religious truth based on prestige and pride. Both were rejected as upstarts, disruptive of the status quo ... But there the similarity ends. Jesus did not conquer Jerusalem. He suffered outside its walls." The Call of the Minaret,

"Yudas Zechariah ... (Judas Iscariot), led the Jews to Jesus and was himself made to bear the likeness of the master. Jesus was taken to heaven and Judas seized by the mobs who crucified him, thinking him to be Jesus. All the while he cried out, "I am not the one you want! I am the one who led you to him." This tradition has since been reported by most commentators. Modern thinkers have generally accepted this."<sup>173</sup>

Another strand of Muslim belief safeguards the triumph of Jesus by asserting that Jesus was crucified but did not die.

"Some modern Muslim writers think that Jesus was crucified but did not die on the cross ... Others take a different line and say that Jesus died indeed, but his death was only of the body, like that of all true servants of God and martyrs of Islam ... Others also say that what the Jews could not kill was the soul of Jesus."<sup>174</sup>

But there is a third strand in Muslim thought which might be called "the agnostic view." This is based upon a more sophisticated interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. The text reads as follows:

"We (i.e. the Jews) slew the Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary, the Messenger of God" - yet they did not slay him, neither did they crucify him, but only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely

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p.302.

172. Ibid., p.295.

173. M. M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology II', in The Muslim World, p.99.

174. G. Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'ān, p.113. "The idea that no one actually bore the image of Christ and suffered in his stead may have had its origins in Mu'tazali circles. To the Mu'tazali, the notion that God could commit acts of injustice, for any reason, was most repugnant." M. M.

are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty - no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise."<sup>175</sup>

The first two theories - those of substitution, and of an apparent death - are derived from differing interpretations of the pronoun qualified by 'made to seem'.<sup>176</sup>

This third theory is derived from an interpretation of the Arabic words for knowledge used in Sura 4. v.156. The Arabic distinguishes between the knowing that God has of the event of Jesus' crucifixion, the foolish, puffed-up conjectures of the Jews, and the knowing of the truth appropriate to God-fearing men.

"The Qur'an ... presents Jesus as a challenge not only to human folly and unbelief (kufr), but equally to human

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Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology II', in The Muslim World, p.102.

175. Sura. 4. v. 156. quoted from A. J. Arberry's translation, The Koran Interpreted.
176. "The Quranic text is somewhat enigmatic, since in Arabic the 'hidden' pronoun in the passive verb, translated 'made to seem so' may refer to crucifixion ('it') or to Jesus ('He'). In the first case, the meaning would be that death by crucifixion 'seemed to happen' but in fact did not. The victim was Jesus in person and He was Himself actually and physically nailed to the Cross. But He did not there succumb. When taken down from the instrument of death, he had not in fact expired. Subsequently, in the tomb, he revived and was 'spirited away' ... (In the second case) ... the pronoun in question is taken as personal and relating to Jesus. It means that He was not killed nor crucified, not in the sense that He did not succumb and die by crucifixion, but that He never came into the position of a victim. The 'seeming' was not a 'death' (only apparent) on His part, but a mistake in identity, seemingly ordered and arranged by God's intervention, on account of which another victim, having all the personal appearance of Jesus, was by error

ignorance and the reliance on mere conjecture. Indeed, the Arabic word zann is the opposite not only of knowledge ('ilm), but also of absolute certainty or faith (yaqin). The Qur'an declares that, "Those who differed concerning him (Jesus) are in doubt regarding it (the truth); they have no knowledge of it (the truth) save the following of conjecture (zann)".<sup>176</sup>

According to this interpretation, the Qur'ān is not interested in the physical death of Jesus, but in the spiritual meaning of the event. For the Jews who claimed to accomplish the death of Jesus, and for those who conjecture whether this was so, all is appearance. The true reality is known only to God. In this, the Qur'ān knew the early Christians were in agreement, i.e. the area is one of mystery - a Docetic interpretation at its best and its truest.<sup>177</sup> In other words, the Qur'ān asserts that, in this matter, as in any other, the knowledge and power of God are far greater than the puny knowledge and supposed might of men.

"If this interpretation is at all plausible, then the Qur'an is addressing not only the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, but all human beings of all times ... The significance of the death of Jesus is not in the how and when of history, but rather in its meaning to a humanity bound to this material plane of existence by lust, greed and anxiety. Nor is the significance of his heavenly subsistence with God dependent on whether his body, his spirit, or both were assumed to heaven. Rather, the significance of Christ's life in heaven is his example as a specially favoured human being who has risen beyond the world of material existence to the divine presence ... Jesus may be taken as a concrete example of the spiritual journey of the man of faith from the plane of material existence to the celestial plane where God alone is: there to Him alone belongs judgement and to

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condemned and executed as if he had been Him." K. Cragg, Introduction to M. K. Hussein, City of Wrong, p.xi.

176. M. M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology II', in The Muslim World, pp. 103-104.

no one of His creatures."<sup>178</sup>

To summarise, then, Muslim religious pre-suppositions within encounter may be identified as follows: Islam is the true and perfect revelation from God; it alone, therefore, is possessed of the law which can bring about a perfected human community, and finally, other religious systems, while good in themselves, are inevitably imperfect conceptions of Truth and stand in need of the correction and purification exercised by Islam.

The implications of Christian and Muslim religion pre-suppositions for personal encounter are not difficult to discern. Both partners bring to interfaith dialogue a presumed monopoly of the truth. While, in some instances, partners are prepared to listen to the truth-stance of the other, neither is ready truly to engage in a radical change of conviction. Christ remains the absolute revelation for the Christian, and the Qur'ān for the Muslim. Christian community remains the ultimate sign of

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177. For the summary contained in this paragraph, I am indebted to Dr Hasan Askari, (see Acknowledgements).
178. M. M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology II', in The Muslim World, pp. 104-105. The death of Jesus is also a concrete example of human, collective perversity - a theme dealt with, from the Muslim side, by M. K. Hussein in City of Wrong. K. Cragg comments in his introduction to the book: "Here more than anywhere mankind is discernible in representative moral perversity, epitomised in ecclesiastical, political and popular choices made by particular people caught in a personal and communal crisis. The Ecce Homo scene in the precincts of the Roman praetorium presents a man to the judgement of the crowd. But such are its implications that the tables are reversed. The man becomes the crisis of the crowd and the moral meaning of the scene becomes a judgement by and of

God's rule in the world for Christians, while the umma remains this for the Muslims. Consequently, both communities are anxious to promote the interpretation and expansion of their respective messages. In effect, both sides enter dialogue deeply influenced by a sense of autonomy. Only perseverance in pursuing personal encounter will effect a modifying of that autonomy. Gradually, the other partner's perception of truth will be discovered, and this will necessitate adjustment and revision of group norms.

In the concluding chapter which follows, the practical implications of historical, social and religious pre-suppositions for Muslim-Christian personal encounter are explored.

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humanity ..., and cries to us all: Ecce Homines, 'Behold men'. Here is humanity." p.ix.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion: implications for the rôle of personal encounter in the development of Christian-Muslim relations in Britain today.**

"Belief and community, it is clear, have a reciprocal relation. To believe is to belong and to belong is to believe. But in actual life this relation has been allowed, by long tradition and inertia, to become thoroughly static and hide-bound. A Muslim cannot reckon with Christian thought and faith without being suspected of communal disloyalty. A Christian who takes any creative interest in Islamic studies tends in the East to be regarded as dubiously disloyal to his own. Questions of belonging dominate: they loom over all spiritual life and enquiry. Can some way out of the impasse not be pioneered where Muslim and Christian meet in the day-to-day obligations of citizenship and commerce or in the common setting of nation, the twentieth century, and being human?"<sup>1</sup>

The negative aspects of this sense of belonging, when brought to the event of personal encounter, have been explored throughout this thesis. The World Council of Churches summarises these as follows:

"(a) We are aware of the many values we share with Muslims, and our meetings have been facilitated by this common ground. But we would not wish to minimize differences, such as the sometimes negative views whereby Islam sees itself as fulfilling and superceding Christianity or whereby Christians dismiss Islam as a heresy or false prophecy. Somewhat going beyond these points of controversy is the more open attitude of, on the one hand, Muslims who have a sense of Abrahamic kinship with Jews and Christians and, on the other hand, Christians who see Islam as a critical judgement upon the Church and then as endowed with its own sense of faith in one God and obedience to Him.

(b) We Christians recognize that Islam claims to possess in

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1. K. Cragg, The Dome and the Rock, p.224. An example of this is the mutual lack of knowledge of each other's scriptures. See *ibid.*, p.219.

its sacred Scriptures a revealed knowledge of Christ some of which does not accord with our own understanding. Not only do Christians and Muslims differ as to their understanding of the authenticity of Christian, Islamic (and Jewish) Scriptures, but they are also unreconciled in their assessment of the significance of the Cross or of the Trinity. It is just as unrealistic to refuse to acknowledge these facts as it is unproductive to insist on them; for example, our past attempts to minimize the religious or moral stature of the Qur'an and Muhammad are unhelpful.

(c) Historically also there has been tension and rivalry from which we are still recovering. The whole history of our relationship in the Middle Ages and beyond and of western colonial expansion in Muslim lands is steeped in this tradition of mistrust and misunderstanding. Even our understanding and practice of mission has fostered a spirit of competitiveness and rivalry."<sup>2</sup>

The need for dialogue at all levels has become a real necessity. Only within the setting of a personal encounter can the differences and agreements become clear, and be accorded their rightful significance in the unity of Christians and Muslims.

"If the difference between two systems is total, then dialogue between them is impossible. If on the other hand the difference is partial ... then dialogue should become feasible once the similarities and the divergences are clarified. If two people know wherein they agree and wherein they differ, then they may intelligibly discuss their respective stands. If, however, each harbours misconceptions about the other's position, and both misconceive what their agreements and divergences actually are, then conversation if it occurs at all proves to be exasperation, or absurdity, or anyway inconsequential. Unfortunately this has largely been the situation historically. Persons of different faith either have not talked together at all, or have talked not with each other so much as past each other."<sup>3</sup>

The rôle of personal encounter in the development of

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2. W.C.C., Guidelines on Dialogue with Peoples of Living Faiths and Ideologies, pp. 152-153.
  3. W. C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, pp. 234-235.

Christian-Muslim relations may be summarised as follows: firstly it alone can heal the rancour and hurt caused by past relations; secondly, it can foster understanding of respective religious conceptions and practices; thirdly, it can engender respect for one another as persons and this will issue in a mutually accorded equality of esteem; fourthly, it can give entrance to a religious experience of the other's apprehension of God; and fifthly, it can engender a mutual commitment to future unity in diversity.

The World Council of Churches has spelt out the rôle of personal encounter in interfaith dialogue in its recommended guidelines to the churches:

1. Churches should seek ways in which Christian communities can enter into dialogue with their neighbours of different faiths and ideologies ...
2. Dialogues should normally be planned together ...
3. Partners in dialogue should take stock of the religious, cultural and ideological diversity of their local situation ...
4. Partners in dialogue should be free to "define themselves" ...
5. Dialogues should generate educational efforts in the community ...
6. Dialogue is most vital when its participants actually share their lives together ...
7. Dialogue should be pursued by sharing in common enterprises in community ...
8. Partners in dialogue should be aware of their ideological commitments ...
9. Partners in dialogue should be aware of cultural loyalties ...
10. Dialogue will raise the question of sharing in celebrations, rituals, worship and meditation ...
11. Dialogue should be planned and undertaken ecumenically wherever possible ...
12. Planning for dialogue will necessitate regional and local guidelines ...
13. Dialogue can be helped by selective participation in world inter-religious meetings and organisations ...<sup>4</sup>

When these guidelines are translated into more practical terms

for Muslim-Christian encounter in Britain, three main areas of concern emerge: the need for more conferences, international, national and local, and the need for more study centres for exchange; the need for neighbourhood projects, visits, committees, shared worship etc; and the need for educational endeavours in schools, colleges and universities.

An example of the first area of concern was the World of Islam Festival in 1976. This consisted of "a huge programme of exhibitions and cultural events, backed up by some radio and television presentations and with extensive press coverage. This festival was a purely "cultural" occasion, organised largely by non-Muslims, and as such was not entirely acceptable to Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Under the auspices of the Islamic Council of Europe, an "International Islamic Conference" was held in London, with speakers from many different countries, at a date to coincide with the opening of the WIF in April. This combination of events had a considerable impact upon the ordinary Christian, who found himself insufficiently prepared mentally or spiritually."<sup>6</sup>

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4. W.C.C., Guidelines for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, quoted in With People of Other Faiths in Britain, pp. 20-25.
  5. "Most Christians probably think of the Muslims in Britain primarily in terms of their nationality, language and occupation. It is not always realised to what an extent "religious" aspects are inseparable from "cultural"." Penelope Johnstone, 'Christians and Muslims in Britain', in Islamochristiani, p.169.
  6. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

Centres and institutes for the study of Islam in relation to Christianity have also an important rôle to play in deepening mutual understanding. "The organisation most deeply involved with Islam, on a theological, ecumenical and practical basis, is the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. The Centre was formally established in 1976, partly as the outcome of an international Christian-Muslim meeting in May 1975, convened by Dr David Kerr, since 1973 Lecturer in Islam at the Colleges and now Director of the Centre."<sup>7</sup>

The second area of concern in which the rôle of personal encounter offers particular promise in the development of Christian-Muslim relations is that of the neighbourhood. Dialogue at the local level begins when people meet each other.

"It began the day we moved in. As the removal van drew up, children and adults appeared as if from nowhere and helped to carry furniture and fittings into our new home. And we had met none of them previously.. Afterwards we went round to express our thanks. Their welcome was overwhelming, and soon we were talking to old friends; even our lack of Urdu and their limited English only added to the fun. Since then we've sampled one another's traditional foods, exchanged gifts, shared in parties, and discussed the similarities and

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7. Ibid., p.196. The conference referred to was that at Chambesy (see Ch. 2 of this thesis). "One symbol of the end of isolation is the new collaborative academic centres that are being set up, in which Western scholars and Muslims work together toward understanding, so that every remark about Islam by a Westerner is consciously made in the presence of Muslims, and every remark about Islam by a Muslim is explicitly made in the presence of those who cannot give a simple "yes" to our question." W. C. Smith, On Understanding Islam, p.298.

differences we'd noticed about our separate faiths."<sup>8</sup>

So, neighbourliness leads to inter-faith dialogue at the level of personal encounter. The first stage of encounter (two distinct and autonomous groups coming together on the basis of I-It) may then give way to a second stage whereby participants begin to draw upon cultural and religious resources to deepen the encounter to a more personal and wholistic level where relatedness is established.<sup>9</sup> Partners become aware of differences and learn to respect them.

"When people of different faiths are in dialogue they need to be aware of the structures and nuances of language, thought and imagery that belong to different religious traditions. For example, Jesus in Christianity has a quite different role to that of Muhammad in Islam or Gotama in Buddhism. Similarly, the significance of, and approach to, the scriptures will be distinctive, the Bible occupying a different role for Christians than the Qur'an does for Muslims. These broad difference creep into the accepted symbols of religion too. The concept of God as Father, freely encouraged by Christians, would be unacceptable to most Muslims, for it would not provide the best model of God in their view. The unravelling of such interwoven skeins is part of dialogue, a process which can only be achieved by patience and understanding."<sup>10</sup>

A third stage of encounter - characterised by an I-Thou relationship - can be achieved whereby participants submit themselves to the full impact of another's viewpoint with the

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8. Peter Loveitt, United Reformed Church, With People of Other Faiths in Britain, p.46.

9. See Chapter 1 of this study.

10. British Council of Churches, Towards a Theology of Inter-Faith Dialogue, p.30.

ensuing possibility of having one's own outlook changed.

"The Birmingham area has a particularly high number of Muslims, the majority from Pakistan. The large purpose-built mosque in Balsall Heath caters for these, and is a centre for various activities; it welcomes groups of visitors, and had more than once received a joint Muslim-Christian conference on questions of topical concern. The Sparkbrook Mosque is equally hospitable ... and similarly has held conversations and discussions between Christians and Muslims, as well as welcoming visitors for Eid celebrations."<sup>11</sup>

A third area of concern in the development of Christian-Muslim relations, at the level of personal encounter, is that of education in schools, in particular, religious education.

"Muslims, and others, are often dissatisfied with the approach to religion in a typically modern RE syllabus. Even the "comparative religion" element is for them no better: putting Islam on the same level as other, non-scriptural religions. Christian parents, too, have often reacted strongly to the multi-faith approach found in schools which no longer have a Christian majority. A typical example is Rochdale, North-West England, much publicised recently. The percentage of Muslim children in the area is very high, and an unexpectedly large number of Muslim parents, presumably with outside encouragement, requested that their children should be withdrawn from R.E. The School's response was to attempt to provide a non-specific R.E.; a move quite unacceptable to the Christian parents, who saw it as an undermining of the religion and culture which forms part of their children's heritage."<sup>12</sup>

From the Muslim side, dissatisfaction with comparative religion in schools is quite strong:

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11. P. Johnstone, "Christians and Muslims in Britain", in Islamochristiani, p.180.

12. Ibid., pp. 181-182.

"It is not safe to presume that declarations of openness and a willingness "to study Islam" will commend themselves to Muslims. The manner in which the study is conducted is crucial, and if it is to proceed along lines identified with the historical/descriptive presuppositions of western scholars then Muslims will continue to feel aggrieved that Islam is being misrepresented. The attempt to understand is transformed, unwittingly, into the cause of offence. The point is that religious education is defective if children are obliged to learn about Islam instead of being helped to measure up to the difference that Islam would make to their lives."<sup>13</sup>

Edward Hulmes enumerated the approaches of comparative religion unacceptable to Muslims:

"First, that Christianity is true and Islam is false ... (secondly) ... Both Christianity and Islam may be seen from the perspective of cultural relativism ... A third approach is that Christianity and Islam are expressions of the same reality ... A fourth approach is that Christianity is a higher expression of religious truth than Islam ... A fifth approach is that both Christianity and Islam become true in the individual's response ... A sixth approach is that Christianity and Islam are on a converging course ..."<sup>14</sup>

The author goes on to specify a seventh approach, more productive for the future development of Christian-Muslim relations: "A seventh approach is that the Christian's approach to the Muslim should be in terms of relatedness and presence."<sup>15</sup>

"The attitude of presence, bringing with it all the possibilities of reproach, misunderstanding and vulnerability, is distinctively, if not uniquely Christian."<sup>16</sup> According to this approach,

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13. E. Hulmes, Commitment and Neutrality in Religious Education, p.52.

14. Ibid., pp. 58-65.

15. Ibid., p. 67.

students and teachers would, ideally, be brought face to face with adherents of another faith, and would learn first hand how a faith commitment pervades the whole of a person's outlook and life-style.

Obviously, Muslim concern in Britain is for the preservation and handing on to future generations of the light of Islam. Encounter with Christians must not mean the loss of Islam. And it is particularly in the sphere of education that this concern manifests itself and affects Christian-Muslim personal encounter. A Muslim author summarises the ideal of Islamic education:

"Education is a part and parcel of the culture of a people and is the instrument through which a culture perpetuates itself. The two cannot be separated from each other just as the flesh cannot be separated from the bone. There is a widespread misconception that a people can emulate without injury the educational system of any country or nation. Unless a people spurn their own culture - something tantamount to nation suicide! - they cannot indiscriminately avail themselves of foreign systems of education. Every system of education basically consists of a set of certain social ideals, norms and values and is based on a specific view of life and culture. It is in this realm that imitation is suicidal. On the other hand as far as techniques and methods are concerned, one country can safely profit from the experiences of others. But great care should be taken in respect of values, principles and ideals, for a conscious and unconscious adoption of them may destroy the entire fabric of a nation's culture."<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the primary purpose of Islamic education "should be to imbue the students with their religion and ideology. They should

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16. Ibid., p.73.

17. A. L. Tibawi, Principles of Islamic Education, p.5.

be taught the meaning and purpose of life, man's position in the world, the doctrines of Tawheed (unity of God), Risalah (Prophethood), Akhirah (Life hereafter) and their bearing upon individual and social life, the Islamic values of morality, the nature and content of Islamic culture, and the obligations, and the mission of a Muslim. Education should produce men with deeply held convictions about the Islamic ideals of individual and collective life. It should develop in them the Islamic approach so that they may carve out their own way in the light of Islamic guidance."<sup>18</sup>

It is not surprising therefore, that the "call for separate Muslim schools has often been voiced in recent years, and has met with a mixed reception, not only from the authorities but from various sections of the Muslim community. It is not clear to what extent Muslim parents really wish their children to receive instruction outside the British educational system - a system which, whatever its failings, is likely to provide the best openings in employment and further studies in Britain."<sup>19</sup>

It now remains to offer a summary of the findings of this study. Firstly, past Christian-Muslim relations have been characterised by an I-It mentality. Knowledge of the other group was objective, theoretical, and, on the whole, prejudiced. Where

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18. Ibid., p.16.

19. P. Johnstone, 'Christians and Muslims in Britain', in Islamochristiani, p.177.

encounter took place, it was within the context of a conflict of cultures and/or religious interests. And conflict has tended to harden respective caricatures. The result is that present-day Christians and Muslims are possessed of set historico-cultural and religious pre-suppositions in regard to each other. Where an open, personal encounter is attempted, these pre-suppositions, inevitably, come into play.

Secondly, education in, and the adoption of the principles of personal encounter would seem to be the best way forward for the future development of Christian-Muslim relations. Participants will thereby learn to move into an I-Thou mentality in regard to the other. Person will begin to emerge as a primary category, although always set firmly within the setting of group belonging. The faith commitment of respective adherents, as well as their cultural and social values will begin to be respected. It may even be hoped that the exercise of personal encounter could bring about lasting changes in negative pre-suppositions, and the fostering of more positive attitudes of mutual appreciation. Lastly, personal encounter could lead to a religious experience of the truth about God enshrined in each other's tradition.

The last word must be left to to Max Warren:

"... Encounter is a term properly used only of the meeting of persons. It can, of course, be used of a meeting in conflict; it can be used as a casual happening; but here it is used as a meeting which aims at understanding and promises friendship. In this sense religions, theologies, systems of belief cannot meet each other. Even attempts at a comparative estimate of their constituent factors bear no relation whatever to the power of faith to shape a man's thinking and determine his

actions. But an individual, if he is humble and patient, can begin to enter into the mind of another individual, and there discover something of the secret by which the other lives ... There is a great deal more meeting of this kind than is always realised. It is one ground of hope for the days ahead."<sup>20</sup>

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20. M. Warren, "The Encounter of Islam and Christianity in the 20th Century", in Islamic Quarterly, pp 108-109.

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