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23. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
25. Firās al-Sawwāh, *Mughāmarat al-'aql al-ūlā: dirāsah fī al-ustūrah - Sūriyah wa bilād al-rāfidayn* (Damascus: Dār al-Kindī, 1989), p. 6.
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- Watt m.  
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## CHRISTIAN APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM: An Analysis of the Writings of Watt and Cragg

Andreas D'Souza

[Editor's note: This is the first part of a two-part article; the second part - dealing with the writings of Cragg and an overall evaluation - will be printed in the next issue.]

Flipping through the pages of *Index Islamicus*,<sup>1</sup> the casual reader is impressed not only by the sheer number of articles in the Islamic Studies field, but by the fact that alongside Muslim contributions are articles by Jews, Christians, and those professing no religious commitment at all. This apparent scholarly collaboration is deceptive, however, for there are definite tensions - even radical disagreements - about the proper way to approach the study of Islam. In the last century in particular, Muslims and others have raised objections to the Orientalists' approach, eliciting counter-arguments, vindications and sometimes apologies from the Orientalists' side. The issue often comes down to this: can people with an explicit Christian faith commitment ever adequately understand and interpret Islam?

Most books, monographs and articles which have tried to answer this question have focused on the methodological issues involved. In contrast, this paper will critically analyze the writings of two very prominent Western Christian scholars of Islam: W. Montgomery Watt and Kenneth A. Cragg. Both authors have tried to move beyond a mere description of Islamic data to the more challenging task of helping Muslims to deepen and strengthen their faith, making it more directly relevant to the questions and issues we face today.

Rather than analyze the prolific writings of these two scholars, I will focus only on those contributions which address one inter-connected theme: the "foundations of faith". Thus, I will first present and then evaluate Watt's and Cragg's expositions on the origin of Islam, the concept of revelation, and the person and function of the Prophet. In trying to answer whether non-Muslims can ever adequately interpret Islam, I will suggest that any study of the Muslim faith must focus on Muslim interpretations, taking seriously - in all its implications - the idea that "Islam is what Muslims say it is."

### Montgomery Watt: A Brief Biographical Sketch

William Montgomery Watt, the only son of the Rev. Andrew Watt, was born in Ceres (Fife), Scotland on the 14th of March 1909. He obtained a Master of Arts in Classics from the University of Edinburgh in 1930 and a Bachelor of Arts in *Literae Humaniores* from Oxford University in 1932. The following year Oxford

60. Al-Aḥḥadīth, Vol. 5, pp. 201-204.
61. Al-Tabarī, Vol. 14, pp. 198-201; Al-Tūḥf, Vol. 5, pp. 201-204; Al-Zamakhsharī, Vol. 2, pp. 262-263; Ibn Kathīr, Vol. 2, pp. 347-348; Al-Shawkānī, Vol. 2, pp. 349-352; Al-Aḥḥadīth, Vol. 3, pp. 293-295; Al-Tabḥḥat al-ʿArabīyah, Vol. 9, pp. 246-253. For the debate between M. J. Kister and Meir M. Bravman over the interpretation of "an yadin" ("readily"), in 9, 29, see Arabica 10 (1963), pp. 94-95; 11 (1964), pp. 272-278; 13 (1966), pp. 307-314; 14 (1967), pp. 90-91.
62. Ibn Kathīr, Vol. 2, pp. 347-348.
63. Tafsiḥ al-Jalālayn, p. 239.

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## CHRISTIAN APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM An Analysis of the Writings of Watt and Cragg

Andreas D'Souza

[Editor's note: This continues and concludes a two-part article which in our previous issue focused on the writings of Montgomery Watt.]

For many reasons, and for many centuries, Christians have been drawn to the study of Islam. Yet, one may legitimately ask whether a person's Christian faith colours or even inhibits his or her understanding of the faith of Muslims. To begin to answer this question, I have focused on the writings of two well-known Western scholars of Islam, looking particularly at their interpretations of the "foundations of faith", a theme which includes the origins of Islam, the concept of revelation, and the person and function of the Prophet. In our appraisal of the writings of Montgomery Watt, I showed that his socio-psychological approach and claims of theological neutrality ultimately lead to interpretations that are neither authentically Muslim nor fully Christian. I now turn to the writings of A. Kenneth Cragg, and will investigate to what degree his approach to Islam leads to a better understanding of Muslim faith.

### A Scholar and a Missionary

Albert Kenneth Cragg, the younger son of Albert and Emily Cragg, was born on the 8th of March 1913. He was educated at some of the best institutions in Great Britain and ultimately obtained his Bachelor of Arts (1934), Master of Arts (1938), and Doctorate in Philosophy (1950) degrees from Oxford University, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation under the guidance of the renowned Islamicist, H. A. R. Gibb.<sup>1</sup>

Concurrently with his academic work, Cragg was also preparing for the priestly and missionary ministry. In 1936 the Anglican Church ordained him as a deacon and appointed him Curate to the Higher Tranmere Parish Church in Birkenhead, where he served until 1939. He was ordained a priest in 1937 and three years later married Theodora Melita with whom he eventually had three sons and a daughter.

Cragg's first missionary assignment was to Beirut, Lebanon, where he worked as Chaplain at All Saints' School (1939-47) and later as Warden at St. Justin's House (1942-47). From 1942 until he left Lebanon in 1947 he also taught at the American University of Beirut as Assistant Professor of Philosophy. Once back in Great Britain, Cragg was appointed Rector of Longworth (1947-52), and later, Sheriff's

For a religious institution which at least since 1302/702 had held to the view that outside itself there was no salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), the whole statement about other religions, within which this section about Islam appeared, represented a considerable shift of emphasis.<sup>45</sup> Part of the reason for the change was a shift towards the conciliar view of authority within the church as represented by a figure such as Nicholas of Cusa (1401/803–1464/868), whose views concerning Islam we referred to in Chapter 5, but a more important reason was the influence of the French Islamicist Louis Massignon (1883/1300–1962/1382).

Massignon's early life provides a fascinating key to the later evolution of his thought concerning Islam. Having lost the Christian faith into which he had been baptised during his teens, he recovered it as a result of the care with which he was looked after by a Muslim family while suffering from malaria in Iraq in 1908/1326. He went on to a distinguished academic career in France, during the course of which he published many books, particularly on Sufism and the figure who held a considerable fascination for him throughout his life, al-Hallāj (857/243–922/309), and he was intimately involved in many of the debates, political and otherwise, which took place during his lifetime. In 1950/1369 he was ordained a priest of the Greek Catholic church (which permits its priests to be married, as Massignon was). In the words of one recent commentator: 'By the force of his personality and the originality of his ideas Louis Massignon was perhaps the only Islamic scholar who was a central figure in the intellectual life of his time.'<sup>46</sup>

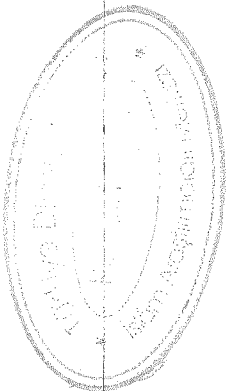
Massignon was convinced that the Holy Spirit was active in Islam, perhaps most dramatically in the life and death of al-Hallāj, which Massignon interpreted as being a kind of re-enactment of the life and death of Christ, since al-Hallāj was crucified in Baghdad after he had exclaimed 'Anā al-ḥaqq' ('I am the truth'). He went so far as to publish, privately, a book in which he expressed the hope that al-Hallāj might be recognised one day by the church as a martyr. But he did not present al-Hallāj as a pseudo-Christian, or an 'anonymous Christian', to use Rahner's phrase; rather, he suggested that al-Hallāj was an authentically Islamic figure, and his existence within the Islamic community was clear evidence that the grace of Christ was as real outside the Christian community as inside it. Breiner summarises:

Massignon never sought to blur the distinctions between Christianity and Islam. He did not believe that Islam was a kind of 'close approximation' of Christianity and that its spiritual value rested in its approach to the teaching of Christianity. Nor did he have any doubts that Islam lacked something in comparison with

Christianity. But he did see believing Muslims as men and women of the Spirit, and he did see the grace of God, which is the grace of Christ, at work in Islam. He, therefore, had no doubts that Islam bound men and women to God.<sup>47</sup>

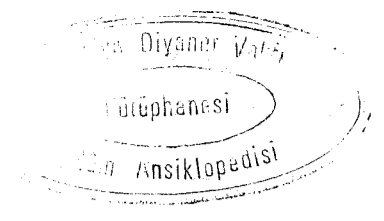
Great stress was therefore laid by Massignon on Islam as an Abrahamic religion, which in a sense provided a genealogy for the activity of the Spirit amongst Muslims, and the influence of his ideas on this can be seen in the careful wording of the statement of the Second Vatican Council. Among the many influential people with whom Massignon corresponded was Cardinal Montini, the Archbishop of Milan who in 1963/1383 became Pope Paul VI, and although Massignon himself died before Montini became Pope, it was partly through this contact that his ideas exerted so much influence at the Council.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently Massignon has enjoyed huge influence both among many of the leading Roman Catholic thinkers about Islam and beyond the Catholic church too; this includes considerable influence among Muslim thinkers from many different parts of the world, so it cannot be denied that he has been one of the major architects of new Christian thinking about Islam in the twentieth/fourteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

It would not be true, however, to suggest that 'inclusivism' has been influential only in Roman Catholic thinking about Islam. To take two other examples, the British Anglican scholar Bishop Kenneth Cragg (b. 1913/1331), has also sought to interpret Islam positively to Christians, as well as seeking to make traditional Christianity more comprehensible to Muslims, particularly in his *The Call of the Minaret*, and has perhaps gone further than any other Christian writer in seeking to weigh the spiritual meaning and significance of the Qur'an for Christians.<sup>50</sup> Building in a sense on the work of Temple Gairdner, Cragg has worked hard to interpret the two faiths to each other, and this has sometimes resulted in harsh judgements being made on his work by members of both communities. Something of the hurt which this has caused to him, as well as a good insight into what might be described as the ambivalence of his position, can be seen in an article whose title is itself very revealing, 'Being Christian and Being Muslim: a Personal Debate'. Here Cragg makes clear both his admiration for some aspects of Islam, especially the Qur'an's stress on 'letting God be God' and locating humanity in its proper place as the 'tenant' or 'trustee' (*khalīfa*) of creation, and also his negative reaction towards other aspects of Islamic teaching, especially the Qur'an's view of divine omnipotence, which he suggests is so overwhelming as to depersonalise God altogether, and the Muslim view of Muhammad as the passive recipient of divine revelation. These two features, Cragg suggests,



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# ORIENTALISM, ISLAM, and ISLAMISTS

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## 'ALONGSIDEDNESS — IN GOOD FAITH?': AN ESSAY ON KENNETH CRAGG

Jamil Qureshi

Dr. Cragg's earlier works<sup>1</sup> have the feel of critical manuals about separate elements of Muslim belief and practice, addressed either to those in missionary work or to Christian minorities in Muslim-majority areas who need to put up a more active, informed resistance to that circumstance. The later works,<sup>2</sup> especially the two book-length essays on the Qur'an, contain more sustained arguments, variations still on the aversion characteristic of all Western-Christian approaches to Islam — that it is a law as well as a faith, that it requires political form and sanctions force. The enterprise is undertaken, avowedly, in a spirit of inter-religious humility, a patient 'alongsidedness,' an exchange both ways of honest, caring criticism. It is not Dr. Cragg's purpose that Muslims should change their religious allegiance. He desires only to bear Christian witness so that, while explaining Muslim belief and practice, he may demonstrate how near Islam comes to Christian sentiments. Whether those who call themselves Muslim continue to do so is not important — what matters is that they feel those Christian sentiments.<sup>3</sup> To bear Christian witness is, for a Christian, an unquestionable right, even a duty. But to do so in the act of explaining Islam is suspect — Dr. Cragg is open to the charge of attempting not conversion but 'subversion,' the political metaphor having a particular bitter-sweet relevance for our general argument.

I do not question the sincerity of Dr. Cragg's intent but his truth in its fulfillment. His efforts to be courteous and understanding often feel — in the experience of this Muslim reader — like the manners of a man much less concerned with the thoughts and feelings of others than with his own reputation of courteousness in their view of him, a rather sticky, shallow courtesy that mars even his best perceptions.<sup>4</sup> The reader might well feel such personal remarks (even if justified, which has yet to be shown) quite improper in an academic context. But I must insist on a certain (I hope properly measured) implacability in this response to Dr. Cragg's work. My object is to illustrate and then share the quality of 'alongsidedness' Dr. Cragg in fact brings to bear upon

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A tribute to Bishop Kenneth Cragg (1913-2012) given  
at the annual reunion (of) the Friends of St. George's  
College, Jerusalem, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013. *St Francis  
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