Introduction

The title phrase of this chapter, ‘Deciding by the Gospel’, has a double resonance. It draws not only on Protestant claims to be Biblically-oriented, but also on a Qur’anic phrase from Q5: 47, which states, ‘And let the people of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed in it’. As will be seen below, Kenneth Cragg is one who takes up this invitation explicitly. Since Protestantism is in view, it is worth noting the historical point that Protestant responses to the Qur’an arose at the same time as Protestantism itself. Martin Luther (d.1546) addressed issues raised by the Qur’an and Islam because his lifetime coincided with a period of intense Muslim-Christian tension. The apparently unstoppable Ottoman forces under Suleiman the Magnificent moved north west through the Balkans and Hungary, reaching the gates of Vienna in the winter of 1528-29.¹ So for Luther, reflecting on Christian response to Islam was an urgent practical need.

Just as the Ottomans covered huge tracts of territory, so the field of Christian response to the Qur’an is a vast terrain, of which only snapshots can be given here. David Marshall’s paper from the Campion Hall seminars summarises many recent Roman Catholic responses. In addition, there already exist surveys of Christian writings about Islam from the last two centuries which include significant Protestant responses to the Qur’an.² For example, both Zebiri and Aydin explore the thought of W. Montgomery Watt, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Kenneth Cragg, among others. Rather than adopting the survey approach here, a small sample of views is

¹ See, amongst others, Adam Francisco, Martin Luther and Islam (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007). As Daniel Madigan notes elsewhere in the Campion Hall seminar papers, a proportion of these Ottoman forces were in fact Christians.
considered with the aim of drawing out underlying issues. However, it needs to be stressed that relatively few Christian writers reflect theologically on how to regard the Qur’an. It is far more common to engage with elements of the content of the Qur’an. Material for a chapter such as the present study is not thick on the ground.

The two figures most prominent in what follows are Karl Gottlieb Pfander and Kenneth Cragg, sometimes seen as representatives of what Zebiri terms ‘the twin dangers of overharmonizing or alienation’. While Cragg has sometimes been perceived as overharmonizing the Qur’an and the Bible, Pfander is more typically seen as profoundly alienated from Islam. Yet both engage with the same underlying question of how to respond to a scripture which is, as both affirm, partly true. Furthermore, both have received a mixed response, and it is not the case that Muslims warmly endorse Cragg’s works because he is less directly combative or challenging than traditional Christian apologists.

Following discussion of the distinctive and personal responses of Pfander and Cragg, briefer consideration is given to the question of categorising the Qur’an within some established Christian theological frameworks. These frameworks are first, natural revelation, and also the question of the status of the Apocrypha in Christian thought as a possible analogy for how to regard the status of the Qur’an.

Karl-Gottlieb Pfander (1803-65)

Pfander merits attention not simply out of historical interest, but because of the ongoing influence of his very direct and probing approach to Islam. Born in South Germany, and trained in Basel, Switzerland, Pfander began his missionary career in Georgia (or Transcaucasia), then a part of Persia. He ministered mainly in Persia in the period 1825-37, during which time he was chosen by his colleagues to write his book ‘The Balance of Truth’. He wrote in German, the text then being translated into Armenian, then Persian, then later Turkish, Arabic, Hindustani and

4 Aydin, after reviewing the thought of Cragg alongside several other thinkers, offers no praise, only implicit criticism of Cragg, in concluding his chapter on Christian responses to the Qur’an (*Understandings*, pp. 163-66).
Pfander was expelled from Persia in 1837 because of Russian rule, and subsequently served in India with the Church Missionary Society from 1841-57. He later spent several years in Constantinople, before dying in England.

Pfander’s method in The Balance of Truth can be summarised simply. First, at the outset of his work, he sets out a list of criteria for true revelation. This approach appears to have been suggested to him by Professor Samuel Lee, the Cambridge professor who published the works of Henry Martyn. Secondly, Pfander presents his understanding of genuinely Biblical teaching. Thirdly he examines the Qu’ran to see if it meets these criteria for true revelation.

Pfander’s five criteria for true revelation state that such revelation must:

1. ‘Satisfy the cravings of the soul of man for eternal happiness’.
2. ‘Be in accordance with the dictates of the conscience’.
3. Reveal God as just and holy.
4. Reveal God as one, eternal and absolute.
5. ‘There must be no real contradictions in a true revelation... the important particulars and doctrines contained in the inspired books must be agreeable to one another’.

The first two criteria involve satisfying innermost human responses, and reflect the particular emphasis of Pfander’s Pietist background. This background is perhaps further evident in that he places these at the beginning of his foundational list of criteria.

Pfander acknowledges that the Qur’an includes teachings which he would regard as true. God is one, eternal, everlasting, almighty, all-wise, all-knowing. The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the sinner at the final

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7 Pfander, Mizan, pp. vi-ix.
8 Powell, Muslims and Missionaries, p. 141.
judgment are affirmed, along with injunctions against idol worship, blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft and false swearing. There is exhortation to love God, to be kind to relatives and to the poor. Pfander endorses these teachings while seeking to expose their origin. ‘It is very plain to every one acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, that Mohammed took these true doctrines and good precepts from them’.  

Pfander then criticises the Qur’an on a number of points. The text contains errors concerning details of the lives of Adam, Noah, Joseph, Moses and Mary, which he attributes either to Muhammad’s remembering what he had heard wrongly, or Jews and Christians informing him wrongly. In addition, the Qur’an denies the deity of Christ, is at the very least unclear over the death of Christ, rejects the Trinity, the ongoing validity of the Biblical scriptures, the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, and replaces love of enemies with the exhortation to make war on other religious communities. Furthermore, ‘the wants of the soul of man cannot be met by the Koran’, while ‘it is necessary that a true revelation should satisfy the cravings which God has implanted in the hearts of mankind’. Finally, there are various teachings which contradict the ‘mercy, love, holiness and righteousness’ of God.

**Reflection**

Pfander sets up a number of specific criteria by which to judge the Qur’an, and then proceeds to examine it on this basis. Pfander’s concern for truth and accuracy is to be commended, as is his detailed knowledge of the Qur’an, aided by his great linguistic gifts. However, his main criticisms of the Qur’an, rather than its details, are in fact that it does not convey peace of heart. ‘The Gospel, in contrast with the Koran, is in the highest degree the giver of comfort and rest to man’. He is also exercised by what he considers to be morally questionable aspects of the Qur’an, in particular its support of the use of force in spreading the message. As for questions of accuracy, it is interesting that, though mentioned, these are not always his primary focus. Powell notes that, ‘Pfander seems then, in his books for Muslims, to have been pre-occupied with an

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emphasis on the ways in which Islam fell short of Christianity, rather than with charges of ‘falsehood’ which were characteristic of medieval and much subsequent polemic’.  

Turning to what Pfander does not choose to do, there is no wrestling with the theological questions of how one might regard the Qur’an if it is not revelation. It is simply, ‘not the Word of God’. He does not reflect on the theological or missiological significance of such similarities as exist between Qur’anic and Biblical teaching. Similarly, he does not explore the reason why certain strands of Qur’anic ideas lead to the rejection of some Christian teachings. Perhaps the most interesting issue for the modern analyst of Pfander’s thought is the role of his list of criteria for true revelation. Is it feasible and useful to draw up such a list? If so, how are Pfander’s criteria to be judged? If they are to be altered, what criteria should be included and why? Finally, should such a list aim to be short and clear, or long and nuanced?

We turn now to a writer whose approach to weighing the Qur’an is in some ways the very opposite of drawing up a list of criteria against which it is to be measured.

Kenneth Cragg (1913-)

Kenneth Cragg, English-born Anglican bishop and prolific writer on Islam, has had a profound effect in some quarters on Christian approaches to the Qur’an. He encourages the careful scrutiny of the Qur’an, not, like Pfander, in order to identify discrepancies with the Bible, but to concentrate on the exploration of ground which he regards as common with Christian belief.

The following analysis of Cragg’s methods and assumptions is based on Chapters 7-9 of his 1984 work ‘Muhammad and the Christian’. Like Pfander, though in very different terms, Cragg is explicit in setting out his Christian basis for approaching the Qur’an, noting, with reference to Q5:47, quoted at the outset of this chapter, that ‘The people of the Gospel must

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15 Powell, Muslims and Missionaries, p. 150.
16 Pfander, Mizan, p. 133.
17 Christopher Lamb, The Call to Retrieval (London: Grey Seal, 1997), offers an intellectual biography.
18 Muhammad and the Christian (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984). Cragg’s most significant other reflection on the Qur’an is found in The Event of the Qur’an (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994 [1971]), but his ideas are distilled conveniently in his study of Muhammad.
decide by the Gospel’. Furthermore, Cragg considers there to be a Qur’anic call for non-Muslims to reflect on the Qur’an, following the invitation to pagans and miscreants [Q4:42, 47:24] to engage in *tadabbur*, or reflection. His principal aim is to put the main points of Christian dispute with the Qur’an in the context of what he terms ‘the question of God’.

Demonstrating an approach contrasting strongly with Pfander’s, he states:

> This chapter has left to silence the traditional fields of Muslim/Christian controversy. It is hoped that it may also be clear that we have done them wiser justice this way... [they are] left latent here, within the positive and often common themes of Islamic faith and devotion. At the end of the day there is only one question. It is the question of God.  

Lamb notes that it is, ‘the areas which he does not touch’, which have left Cragg open to criticism, more than his perceived reading of Christian themes into the Qur’an. Yet Cragg recognises that his chosen areas of discussion are part of a wider set of questions. ‘Creation and creaturehood, parental care and family bonds, the mercy behind phenomena, the precedents of fidelity we inherit from patriarchs and prophets, and the providence we discern in our affairs. It may be that a sense of community in these areas will help us to care more wisely and duly for the questions that remain’. Rather than being otherworldly in avoiding areas of conflict, Cragg sees his approach as driven precisely by the demands of his age. ‘It is important, in our common contemporary stresses, to maximise the Scripture’s undoubted emphasis on reverence, justice, gentleness and dignity’.

Despite this, Cragg does not seek easy agreement with Muslims. Sometimes he resists trends within Muslim interpretations of the Qur’an. For example, he argues that the Qur’an itself opposes common Muslim interpretation on the issue of whether the names of God in Islam (commonly termed the ninety-nine names, such as ‘the Wise’ or ‘the Loving’) show God and human beings in relationship. Cragg affirms that they do, whereas Muslim theologians typically consider these names not to provide insight into the character of God. However, as this example illustrates, it is more often the interpretations of Muslims which Cragg challenges,
rather than the Qur’anic text itself. At other times he engages directly with potential unease over the Qur’anic text, unease in himself as well as others. For example, he admits that the Quranic teaching on eternal doom can seem forbidding. But, he argues, this is a concession to the ‘vivid literalism of the Meccan mind...So read, even the strident anathemas and the sharp denunciations of the Book need not deprive us of its central emphases on divine sovereignty, justice and compassion’.\textsuperscript{25}

‘Deciding by the Gospel’

Cragg’s discussion of ‘deciding by the Gospel’ is framed by his desire to ‘face the Christian dissuasives about Islam... in the more unifying terms of Islam’s own convictions about God and man’... ‘full justice is done this way to all that is at stake in traditional controversy about Christology and salvation. But there can be hope it will also be better justice, in that it will be a search for areas of religious reference where we can be at one’\textsuperscript{26}. While in Cragg’s view this approach may yield practical benefits, it is never simply pragmatism, but merges with the principle of genuine concern for the other. This is a principle which Cragg sees as fundamental to following Christ - ‘This stance will be closer to the mind of Jesus’\textsuperscript{27}.

Cragg raises three overarching questions about the Qur’an. The first concerns transcendence – is divine sovereignty to be understood as to leave no room for human choices? For Cragg, human beings must have freewill for idolatry to be regarded as a problem. ‘This is what any intelligent Christian hears the Qur’an saying’.\textsuperscript{28} So in Cragg’s view the Qur’an can answer this question positively, if rightly interpreted. The other two questions are not so easily resolved.

Secondly, there is the question of law. Is prophethood and the bringing of law the ultimate solution to the problem of the human condition? Or might God do something more radical than send a message, namely send his incarnate son? Cragg remarks that the idea of prophethood as the ultimate solution is challenged in the New Testament, not least by Jesus’ description of John the Baptist as ‘more than a prophet’ (Matthew 11:9).\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{25} Cragg, \textit{Muhammad}, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{26} Cragg, \textit{Muhammad}, pp. 122-23.
\textsuperscript{27} Cragg, \textit{Muhammad}, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{28} Cragg, \textit{Muhammad}, pp. 104-05.
\textsuperscript{29} Cragg, \textit{Muhammad}, p. 125.
Thirdly, there is what Cragg terms the question of salvation – are people fulfilled? This question recalls Pfander’s Pietist focus on the ability of a faith to meet the deepest human needs.

**Cragg’s Principal challenges to the Qur’an:**

Cragg raises other questions for the Qur’an, the first being its punitive element. Muhammad seems too enthusiastic (‘sanguine’) about damnation. ‘The Qur’an could well profit from the impatience of Job’.\(^\text{30}\) Secondly, Cragg is troubled by the Qur’anic emphasis on the success of the Muslim community. He finds some awareness that worldly triumph has its dangers, citing Q110: 1-3 where Muhammad is instructed to ‘praise God and seek his forgiveness’ when he sees large numbers turning to faith. But for Cragg, such caution over apparent success in this world is too rare in the Qur’an. ‘What is disconcerting is the absence of self-interrogation and of a sense of the need to suspect interests that are so readily taken to be God’s.’\(^\text{31}\) He suggests that an imaginary ‘Epistle of St Paul to the Meccans’ would be underline the fact that collective success and external institutions do not constitute salvation.

Thirdly, Cragg questions what he sees as the Muslim depiction of the utter transcendence of God. The Christian wants to bring into the picture ‘the dimension of grace and participation with man’.\(^\text{32}\) Even the famous portrayal of the nearness of God in the Qur’an (Q50:16 – ‘We are close to him than his jugular vein’)\(^\text{33}\) is a portrayal of ‘vigilant watchfulness’ which may lead to judgment. As a result of its urge to avoid idolatry and associating God with man, ‘Has Islam suffered... a tragic loss of what we must call divine association with humanity in grace?’\(^\text{34}\)

**Reflection**

A fundamental question about Cragg’s response to Islamic thought is whether his challenges are to the Qur’an, or only to Muslim interpretations of the Qur’an. The Gospel concerns of grace, incarnation, suffering love, redemption, ‘can hardly be excluded from those deep implications of Qur’anic theism so firmly present in the Book’s robust witness to creation and its human

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\(^{30}\) Cragg, *Muhammad*, p. 130.

\(^{31}\) Cragg, *Muhammad*, p. 132.


\(^{34}\) Cragg, *Muhammad*, p. 135.
Rather than challenge the Qur’an itself, Cragg more typically, though not exclusively, challenges the failure to observe themes which are present but overlooked.

Cragg affords the Qur’an ‘revelatory status’, while considering that it came to Muhammad ‘in a context of personal thought, experience, travail and activity’ – not the traditional passive role which Muslim theologians attribute to Muhammad. As Lamb notes, ‘Cragg handles the Qur’an essentially as literature recording religious experience’ and ‘there is little doubt that it is religion as art which more than anything engages his attention in the Qur’an’.

Yet many Muslims find unacceptable Cragg’s view that divine revelation in scripture inevitably involves the consciousness of the prophet or author. As Aydin comments about Cragg and others, such a position ‘clearly opens to discussion the sacred nature of the Qur’an. From the dialogical point of view, this cannot lead to Christian-Muslim understanding but to controversy between them’. Whether dialogue is futile unless it leads to such ‘understanding’, in the sense of greater sympathy, is a question reserved for the close of this chapter.

Pfander and Cragg exemplify extensive personal responses to the Qur’an. Briefer attention can now be given to attempts to classify the Qur’an which draw on existing Christian theological categories of thought.

The Qur’an as General Revelation

Michael Nazir Ali (b. 1949), an Anglican bishop of Pakistani origin, has written extensively on Muslim-Christian relations. In *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* he comments in a way which recalls Cragg, ‘The Qur’an is often more open to Christian concerns and meanings than Muslim orthodoxy allows’. Yet he also makes clear that the Qur’an must be judged by the

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35 Cragg, p. 137.
36 Cragg, p. 153.
37 Lamb, *Retrieval*, p. 139.
Bible as a standard of truth.\textsuperscript{40} On the question of the Qur’an as revelation he offers this carefully worded statement:

In at least some parts of the Qur’an (say the \textit{Fāṭihah} or ‘\textit{Alaq}), there seems to be a genuine encounter with the Supreme Reality of the universe. Does this amount to a revelation? Yes, in the sense that a revelation is vouchsafed to human beings in creation and in conscience (a fact that the Qur’an makes much of) and this can cause one to ponder upon one’s relation to the ultimate meaning of the universe. We can also accept as true all that the Qur’an records accurately of biblical persons and events.\textsuperscript{41}

Nazir Ali is here responding to the existence in the Qur’an of truths accepted by the Christian. Without using the term, Nazir Ali draws on the traditional distinction in Christian thought between general and special revelation. He accepts that the Qur’an reflects God’s general revelation, manifested through creation and conscience, but implicitly excludes it from sharing in the special revelation given through the Biblical prophets and supremely in Jesus.

So Nazir Ali challenges the Qur’an wherever it is perceived to differ from the Bible. This inevitably relegates the Qur’an to a subordinate status. But does subordinate in effect mean that it has no spiritual value for Christians? This question is addressed by the exploration of the Qur’an alongside the status of the Apocrypha.

\textbf{The Qur’an as parallel to the Apocrypha}

Can Christians read the Qur’an for their own spiritual benefit? If so, to what category of writings can it be compared? Two recent writers, Peter Ford and Matthias Zahniser, apparently independently, have argued that the Qur’an can be regarded as akin to the Apocrypha. After a brief explanation of the nature and history of the Apocrypha, the ideas of Ford, a missionary and educator with the Reformed Church in America, currently based in Kenya, will form the main focus of what follows.

The Apocrypha, from a word meaning ‘hidden’ is a term adopted by the Bible translator Jerome (c. 347-420) for a series of Jewish works from the period c 300 BC-100 AD. Jerome

\textsuperscript{40} Nazir Ali, \textit{Frontiers}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{41} Nazir Ali, p. 128. The \textit{Fatihah} is Sura One, while ‘\textit{Alaq} is Sura 96.
discovered that these were included in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, but were not in the Hebrew text, which he was using as the basis for his new Latin translation. He described these works as ‘for the edification of the people but not for the establishing of ecclesiastical dogmas’. Subsequently, it became customary to add other books to the Latin Bible which Jerome had not included, such as 4 Ezra. Bruce, providing a convenient listing of titles such as Judith, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, comments, ‘There is no evidence that these books were ever regarded as canonical by the Jews, whether inside or outside Palestine, whether they read the Bible in Hebrew or in Greek’. Typically, they were included with other Biblical texts, but with the advent of the Reformation and its emphasis on Scripture, the question of what exactly counted as Scripture naturally gained in significance. Luther, in his German Bible, separated the Apocryphal Books from the other Biblical texts, designating them ‘Books which are not to be held equal to holy scripture, but which are useful and good to read’. Later Protestants excluded them altogether, and today they are found included, as a separate section, in some Bible translations, but excluded from many others.

So the Apocrypha offer a historical precedent which some Christians have granted can ‘useful and good to read’ despite not being regarded as canonical scripture. Peter Ford draws on this precedent in his exploration of a Christian model for how to regard the Qur’an. He discusses Christian writers who try to establish the Qur’an as a sacred text not just for Muslims, but as a work which can be of spiritual benefit to Christians and other non-Muslims. Ford is unsatisfied that this second position is usually grounded in abandoning traditional Muslim understandings of the Qur’an where these appear to contradict core Christian beliefs, such as over the crucifixion of Jesus. For Ford, this hardly seems a significant step forward for Christians in their appreciation of the Qur’an, so he seeks ‘a model for them by which the Qur’an can appropriately be received’. How can a Christian affirm ‘that the Qur’an may speak to both communities with divine authority’?  

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42 For a useful summary see F. F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture, (Glasgow: Chapter House, 1988), pp. 87-93.  
43 Quoted by Bruce, Canon, p. 92.  
44 Bruce, Canon, pp. 98-99.  
46 Bruce, Canon, p. 102.  
This is where he draws on the example of Christian treatment of the Apocrypha. Likewise with the Qur’an, Ford suggests. ‘While it need not evince conformity in all matters of doctrine, it may yet be viewed as a kind of scriptural supplement for spiritual and theological reflection, particularly for those who are in regular contact with the Islamic cultural and religious ethos’. 49

For Ford there is clearly here a practical benefit that reaches beyond an abstract exercise of ‘classifying’ the Qur’an according to a Christian theological scheme. His aim is particularly to help those nurtured in an Islamic environment to benefit spiritually from reading the Qur’an as well as the Bible. Though he does not state this explicitly, this is presumably to help Christians in such an environment reduce the sense of dislocation from their own culture which they might experience.

This search for practical benefit is also made by Mathias Zahniser, an American scholar, who suggests the Apocrypha as ‘an analogy for the relation of the Qur’an to Christian canonical scripture’. 50 Zahniser several times emphasises that the Qur’an should only be read for spiritual benefit where it can be ‘interpreted in compatibility with the New Testament’. 51 Like Ford, Zahniser cites Luther as an example of someone willing to accept a certain value in the Apocrypha while still regarding them as at points incompatible with true Biblical teaching. 52

While Ford and Zahniser’s proposal is thought-provoking, it also has problematic elements. First, the Apocrypha do not contain direct criticism of central Christian doctrines, in contrast to the Qur’an’s criticisms of the divine sonship and crucifixion of Jesus. 53 It is hard to imagine that Jerome or Luther would have commended the Apocrypha in the same way if these works had been similarly critical of Christian beliefs.

There is also a more practical issue to face. The argument of Ford and Zahniser presumes that the reader will readily be able to distinguish Qur’anic teachings which agree with the Bible

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49 Ford, p. 163.
51 Zahniser, ‘Doctrine’, p. 43.
52 Zahniser, ‘Doctrine’, p. 34.
53 This statement reflects the overwhelming majority of Muslim views, even though there are scholarly debates about whether the Qur’an is in fact criticising views not held by mainstream Christianity.
from those which do not. However, this sifting and comparing of scriptural ideas is no simple task. It requires extensive understanding of both texts and also of the traditions of interpretation associated with them to compare the Qur’an and the Bible’s teachings on such topics as forgiveness, God’s justice, providence, or the relation of faith and works. Many readers may experience more confusion than help through such a process.

**Conclusion**

Is there, as Cragg argues, really ‘only one question.. the question of God’? In one sense, of course, yes, in that all the issues discussed so far relate to God. If so, how is ‘the question of God’ to be approached? In particular, how are concepts of God connected to or revealed in a narrative of events, by which it is claimed that God entered or otherwise interacted with the world. The Bible and Qur’an contain two different narratives, with the Qur’an denying the central narrative of events as recorded in the New Testament. So what is the relationship between the portrayal of the character of God and the portrayal of his actions?

This leads to a question for Cragg’s approach, which clearly comes the closest of those mentioned to accepting the Qur’an as revelation (albeit on Cragg’s own definition of the term). Is the Qur’an’s portrayal of God primarily limited because the divine character so portrayed is unappealing to Cragg, or also because it denies or excludes historical events, namely the crucifixion, resurrection, post-resurrection appearances and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Could there be a more involved, feeling, immanent God portrayed, who nevertheless is said not to have worked through Christ, his death and resurrection? Is there a danger, if all focus goes on the question of what God is like, of underplaying issues over how he has acted in human history. Cragg is clearly concerned with perceptions of how God acts - he objects to the Qu’ranic emphasis on victory and military effort. But he does not make explicit what is to be done with the emphatic denial of, for example, the theological significance of the cross within Islam.

Zebiri points out the likely Muslim response to even the most sympathetic of Christian readers of the Qur’an. ‘Since they do not subscribe to the Muslim theory of revelation – either for the Qur’an or for their own scriptures – their approaches, however well-meaning, are often

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54 As in n.52, above, this statement reflects the vast majority of Muslim views on the crucifixion.
seen by Muslims as potentially or actually subversive’. This returns us to Aydin’s remark, quoted earlier, that a stance in dialogue which understands the Qur’an to involve any human element cannot help Muslim-Christian understanding. His use of the term ‘understanding’ here implies ‘sympathetic understanding’, rather than simply being better informed. But what should be the aim of Christian responses to the Qur’an? In particular, what is the relationship between the pursuit of truth and the nurturing of such understanding? These broader questions take us beyond the scope of the present study. If it is the case that ‘grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17) then a concern for grace in dealing with others, while important, needs blending with a constant concern for the pursuit of truth. There is much to be done by Christian thinkers in working out theological responses to the Qur’an and in exploring the implications of ‘deciding by the Gospel’.

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