

Constance Padwick's Study of Muslim Devotion: a Provocation to Christian Mission

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In an account of her travels across the Muslim world the missionary Constance Padwick recalled a particular moment in a souk in Damascus where she was in search of Muslim prayer books:

I grew insistent that there must be some books concerned with higher things, and, under pressure and secretly, another little pile was revealed to me. A Syrian friend barricaded it with his body from the public view while the infidel woman turned over the pages of a specially blessed book. It was a prayer-manual compiled by a sheikh who died some three hundred years ago and was buried at Mecca. It was a book of those devotions wherein lies the religious strength of Islam...it meets the human need for something more warm and personal than the official worship of Islam.¹

This essay examines the development of an approach to missionary work in the Muslim world in the light of engagement with Islamic devotion. The subject is explored through an account of the work of Constance Padwick, who worked for the Nile Mission Press (NMP), the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Egypt, Palestine, and Sudan between 1916-1951. The essay will argue that a close study of Islamic piety prompted Padwick to propose new ideas about missions and the future of the Church in the

¹ Constance Padwick "Some Types of Literature in the World of Islam," in *The Moslem World of To-day* ed. John Mott (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 159.

Muslim world. It will begin with an analysis of Padwick's engagement with Islam viewed through the lens of her Christian formation and growing interest in "popular" piety. Following this it will be argued that Padwick, who was shaped by her own Evangelical upbringing, was persuaded that the prayer books gave access to the "pulsing life of Islam". This approach identified moments of "kinship" between Christianity as the "religion of the heart" and the "warm and personal" in Islam.

In the second part these ideas will be drawn out through an exposition of some of the central thematic foci Padwick chose to educe and in a sense impose upon the Muslim prayers as a means of ordering them. In the final part the essay will highlight the implications of Padwick's particular reading of Islam for her suggestions regarding the future of Christian missions in the Muslim world. It will aim to show how Padwick's engagement with Muslim prayer, a form of inter-religious encounter, shaped her theology of Christian mission to Islam.

Before proceeding to Padwick's study of Islamic devotion, a short biographical sketch will help place her in the context of developments in early 20th century English Christianity.

Constance Padwick: 1886-1968

Constance Padwick was born in 1886 in West Thorney, Sussex. Her father was a non-practising barrister who farmed his own land. At the age of ten she was sent to live in London with her godmother, who took responsibility for the education of the children of the household, some of whom were the great grand-children of Josiah Pratt, a founding member of the CMS. Hence Padwick experienced a strong Evangelical influence from an early age. Following time in the CMS Children's Department in London, and six years working for the Nile Mission Press in Cairo, in 1923 Padwick applied and was accepted to work with Temple Gairdner in the CMS

office in Cairo. Here she worked under the aegis of the CMS and the IMC as the Secretary for the Central Christian Literature Bureau responsible for the production and circulation of Christian literature in the Muslim world.² Following her time in Egypt Padwick worked in Palestine and Northern Sudan. In 1957 she retired to England, where she lived with her sister in Somerset until she died in 1968. Padwick has been received as an expert on Muslim spirituality³ and is remembered in missionary circles for her biographies of Henry Martyn and Temple Gairdner. However, it is as a mission strategist that her legacy is most significant and it is in this vein that this essay seeks to engage with her work on Islamic piety.

The emphasis on the “religion of the heart” found in Protestant Evangelical circles shaped Padwick’s desire to present the prayers of Islam as “an index to the beliefs of the heart rather than a handbook of official theology”.⁴ The new Evangelical agencies of the late 19th century took their colour from the Keswick movement, which became a vital recruiting ground for the missionary societies. Like most English Evangelicals Padwick was influenced by the teaching of the Keswick conventions.⁵ Faithful to Evangelical spirituality, she eschewed an explicitly

² Padwick’s interest in popular piety, which she later pursued through her study of Islamic devotions, was fuelled by her early study of Egyptian folklore. Funded by a scholarship from the School of Oriental Studies in London, Padwick spent nine months conducting ethnographic research amongst the Egyptian peasant communities of Lower Egypt.

³ See the reviews of Padwick’s *Muslim Devotions* by: Anne Marie Schimmel (*Die Welt des Islams* 7 (1961)): 192-194; Wilfred Cantwell Smith (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 25 (1962)): 351-333 and Titus Burckhardt (*Kairos* 5 (1963)): 156-158.

⁴ Constance Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer Manuals in Common Use* (London: SPCK, 1961; reprinted Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 43.

⁵ At the turn of the century Protestant Evangelicalism in Britain was most explicitly expressed through the Holiness movement, which has been said to have had the single most important influence on English Evangelicalism in the second half of the 19th century. Initially growing out of Methodist and Quaker teachings, in England it developed through the launch of the Keswick Conventions in 1873-1875 and shaped the prevailing English Evangelical faith of the 20th century. To the question “How should we obey?” the response came “From the heart, not from our brain, our understanding, but from the heart”. The cross was the fulcrum of a teaching that encouraged a quest for spirituality

apologetic approach and developed a theology of mission that emerged out of an engagement with devotion.

In the early 1920s tensions arose within the Evangelical wing of the Church of England and splinter groups began to form.⁶ One group that inspired Padwick was the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement, which was established in 1923.⁷ The AEGM resisted the restrictive nature of conservative Evangelicalism and expressed a desire for a broader Christian teaching that respected the experience of other religions. It called for repentance by the Western Church, which was guilty of keeping “its hands too heavily on the Churches of the East”, urging the missionary societies to “develop a greater sensitiveness to the feelings of the native Christians among whom [their] life is cast”.⁸

The third, and perhaps more surprising, element in Padwick’s Christian development is her interest in Catholic devotion and spirituality. This grew through her reading of Christian contemplatives such as Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross as well as the writings of contemporary scholars and spiritual directors such as Baron von Hügel. This engagement with Catholicism was deepened by a sustained correspondence and friendship with the French Orientalist Louis

(with a focus on stillness and rest) with an emphasis on the experience of religious faith. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) and *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000); Ian Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1989).

⁶ On the broadening of Evangelical theology in the early 20th century, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 198-203; Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism and Theological Liberalism 1890-1930* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

⁷ Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, 46.

⁸ A.W Davies ‘The Presentation of the Gospel Abroad’, in *Liberal Evangelicalism: An Interpretation*, ed. T.G. Rogers, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 280.

Massignon as well as by the influence of Charles de Foucauld, both of whose engagements with the Muslim world had an impact on Padwick's missiology.⁹

A study of the religion of 'ordinary' people

Padwick began collecting Muslim prayer books in the early 1920s. She traveled across the Islamic world in search of these little books, which were usually no larger than a postcard, soft and light so that they could easily be carried. They could sometimes be found in overcrowded markets, buried under bottles of Johnson's Talcum powder and piles of Pears' soap. Or they might be on display in front of a mosque where a pedlar had opened his pack.¹⁰ Her collection grew to 150 little prayer books. During the twenty years that followed she read and studied the manuals usually assisted by a Muslim friend or teacher. After setbacks due to complications with publishers, war and sickness, *Muslim Devotions: a Study of Prayer Manuals in Common Use* was eventually published in 1958.

Muslim Devotions was born out of "a deep sense of the need for better understanding of Islam by Christians as of Christianity by Muslims".¹¹ Padwick sought to correct misunderstanding with an account of the religious life of ordinary people – what she described as "popular" religion.¹² Padwick's introduction to Islam established a basis for Christian-Muslim encounter through the experience of the life of worship rather than through questions of doctrine or apologetics. This, Padwick

⁹ See Michael Ipgrave's Campion Hall paper for an account of the contribution of Louis Massignon and Charles de Foucauld to Christian-Muslim engagement.

¹⁰ Kenneth Cragg, "Constance E. Padwick: 1886-1968," *The Moslem World* 59, (1969): 30-39.

¹¹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xxix. She added that the book was written as "an attempt to provide for other beginners information that the writer would most gladly have had at her disposal on arriving in Arabic lands".

¹² For distinctions between "popular" religion and "orthodox" religion, and their impact on the study of Islam see Jean Jacques Waardenburg & Peter Vrijhof, *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 340-386; Robert Scribner, *Popular Culture, Popular Movements* (London: Hambledon, 1987), 18ff.

believed, would offer the missionary an understanding of Islam that echoed her own Protestant Evangelical spirituality and allow the missionary to present the Gospel in a manner that was more appropriate to the Muslim enquirer.

The prayers of the Sufi orders were the most appropriate material for the task because they depicted the worship and religious practice of the ordinary Muslim, illustrating, as she puts it, the effect of the Sufi tradition “to-day in the moulding of devotional life”.¹³ As Gairdner once said, through Sufi prayers and dhikr “millions of the commonalty of Islam, desert tribesmen, peasants, shopkeepers, tradesmen, feed their emotional life and find their chief interest in religion”.¹⁴

The prayer books are compilations of prayers and devotions written by Sufi saints and scholars. The dates of their production range between the eighth and the twentieth centuries. They house a combination of traditional prayers of the Prophet, Qur’ān verses, blessings of the Prophet, forgiveness-seeking, refuge-seeking and cries of praise, which are to be said after the prayers of one of the canonical hours.¹⁵ Some of the manuals, such as the famous *Dalā’ilu ’l-Khairāt* by the 15th century Moroccan Sufi Muhammad al-Jazūlī, are collections of litanies asking God to bless and show mercy and kindness to the Prophet.¹⁶ Another poem, the *Burda* is entirely devoted to praise and blessing of the Prophet.¹⁷ Other manuals, such as the *Afḍalu* ʿs-

¹³ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xxii.

¹⁴ W. H. T. Gairdner, “Christianity and Islam,” in *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Thought and Life: Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24th-April 8th., 1928* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928) Vol 1, 247.

¹⁵ As Padwick observes, their place in Islam would be similar to the idea of the whole laity of the Anglican Church praying the Daily Office before proceeding to other devotional prayer. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 9.

¹⁶ This prayer begins with a recitation of the ninety-nine Names of God and then moves into a collection of prayers containing over a hundred names of the Prophet.

¹⁷ This prayer by the Egyptian Sufi Muhammad al-Būsīrī, the full name of which is *al-Kawākib ad-Durrīya fī Madh Khayr al-Barīya* (“Celestial Lights in Praise of the Best of Creation”), speaks of his love and devotion to the Prophet.

ṣaluwāti by Yūsuf b. Ismā‘īl an-Nabhānī, contain a combination of prayers of devotion to God and to the Prophet with instructions for prayer and religious practice.

By the 19th century the Sufi Orders had crystallised into structured organisations that were central to everyday religion and influenced devotional life across the social and educational spectrum.¹⁸ The integration of the Sufi brotherhoods with the rites and beliefs of ordinary religion explains why their prayer manuals would have been appropriated by a range of people from a variety of social, religious and educational backgrounds. In Egypt the Sufi orders reached the peak of their power and influence in the late 19th century but as Padwick and others since have noted, even after their “official submergence” in the early decades of the 20th century they were still “exerting their influence” and reflected “contemporary popular devotion”.¹⁹ Whilst each prayer book is connected to one of the Sufi orders, they were ubiquitous in popular religious life. As Padwick notes: “it seems almost impossible for a man seeking for instruction in prayer, beyond directions for the daily prayer rite, to avoid works connected with one or other of the orders... Inquiry among Muslim friends in Arabic lands makes it clear that to possess and use the

¹⁸ It might seem odd to consider the Sufi orders and their prayers as central to mainstream Islam, but the history of their growth and development from the 12th century explains how this came to be. Over the course of Islamic history the nature of the Sufi brotherhoods changed. They began as ad hoc gatherings with no formal structure that were divorced from political and common religious life. However, by the 15th century the orders had merged with the saint-cult. This sealed the relationship with the religion of the ordinary people and the boundaries between “official religion”, “popular religion” and “folk religion” became more blurred. For a history of the development of the Sufi orders see J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); F. de Jong, *Ṭuruq and Ṭuruq-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt: A Historical Study in Organizational Dimensions of Islamic Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); G. P. Makris, *Islam in the Middle East: A Living Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 142-174.

¹⁹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xiii; Michael Gilson, “Some factors in the decline of the Sufi Orders in modern Egypt,” *The Moslem World* LVII (1967), 11-19.

prayers of one of the orders...does not necessarily imply membership in the order in question.”²⁰

Muslim Devotions: Christian engagement with Islamic devotion

As she explains her introduction to *Muslim Devotions* Padwick wanted “to let [the prayer manuals] speak for themselves”.²¹ In so doing her aims were twofold. First, she sought to correct Christian misunderstandings of Islam with a view to giving the missionary a new context for her engagement with Muslims. Rather than the “intolerably arid” world of theology, the prayer manuals display “much more kinship with another and warmer climate of the Qur’ān”.²² Padwick selects different devotional prayers (*adhkar*), which she isolates and groups together in order to expound a particular point of worship or practice in Islam.²³ Second, she wanted to draw out experiences and teachings in the prayers for which related experiences of devotion could be found in Christianity. By dwelling on the moments of kinship Padwick implies that there might be opportunities in the discourse where the Christian message could, as Gairdner put it “transcend and enrich that which is dimly perceived and neglected or distorted in Islam”.²⁴ Taking her first aim, we see

²⁰ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xii.

²¹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xxix.

²² Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 179.

²³ *Muslim Devotions* is divided into three principal parts: “On the Threshold of the Prayer-rite”; “Within the Prayer-rite”; and “Outside the Prayer-rite”. “On the Threshold of the Prayer-rite” deals with “The Call to Prayer”; “The Prayer of Mediation”; “The Intention”; and “The Prayer of Confrontation”. “Within the Prayer-rite” covers Muslim teachings on the praise of God; salutation of the Prophet; penitence; pardon; and petition. “Outside the Prayer-rite” considers “The Saints in Worship”; “The Worship of the Creator”; “Answers to Prayer”; and “The Last Things”. Each chapter introduces a discussion on an aspect of Muslim belief and practice through a particular moment before, during or outside the prayer-rite.

²⁴ Gairdner, “Christianity and Islam”, 212.

examples of how Christian misunderstandings of Islam are addressed in an analysis of Islam's attitude to sin and sacramental life.

I) "Correcting" Western misinterpretations of Islam

i) The Islamic understanding of sin

In her analysis of sin in Islam Padwick offers a critique of assumptions commonly held by Europeans living in Muslim countries that "any sense of personal sinfulness is rare amongst the people of Islam".²⁵ Exhorting the reader to "look deeper", a call she made repeatedly throughout the book, Padwick claims that the teaching of the manuals shows a keen awareness of the sin of the individual. She chose excerpts that convey an understanding of penitence that is not dissimilar to the Christian worshipper's sense of herself set in a world of temptation and testing: "My God, Thou hast created me, a body, and with it hast given to me instruments of obedience or disobedience, and hast appointed for me in my own nature a soul clamant for selfish ends, and after this Thou hast said to me, 'Abstain, my servant!' Through Thee (only) can I guard my innocence."²⁶

Padwick probes the Islamic interpretation of sin to ask whether there exists an awareness of sinfulness and the sense of stirring the conscience.²⁷ Against the canon of Christian scholarship, which claimed that Islam has a purely external

²⁵ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 174. An example of the Christian assumptions critiqued by Padwick occurs in Gairdner's argument that because for Muslims it is Allah's decree that constitutes "good" actions right and "bad" actions wrong, "there is no real understanding of holiness or of sin in themselves". (W. H. T. Gairdner, *The Rebuke Of Islam* (London: United Council for Missionary Education, 1920), 111). Here we begin to observe how Padwick, albeit implicitly, moved beyond Gairdner as she sought to nuance conventional interpretations of Islam.

²⁶ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 174, citing *Munājātun*, attributed to 'Ali Zain al 'Ābidin *As Sahifatu 's-sajjidiyya*.

²⁷ For more by Padwick on sin and Islam, see *With Him in His Temptations* (London: Sheldon Press, 1949).

conception of sin and salvation,²⁸ Padwick attempts to show that “whatever theology may have striven to express of remote transcendence”,²⁹ the popular piety of the manuals alluded to a strong sense of the all-seeing eye of God and in this an awareness of human sinfulness: “Nothing was ever invisible nor will be invisible to Thee: from Thee no secret is hid, nor does aught stray away from Thee under cover of darkness.”³⁰

As she sought to ‘correct’ misunderstanding of Islam, Padwick challenged the Western interpretation of the Muslim worshipper as “a lonely mortal before an unknowable and unresponding Remote”.³¹

ii) The relationship of the believer to the divine: Ibada, Sujūd and Tasbīh

The most widely used Arabic word for the approach of humankind to God is ‘*ibada*’.³² The root ‘*bd*’ gives words associated with the relationship of slave to lord, service to a god. Through excerpts from the manuals Padwick suggests an interpretation of ‘*ibada*’ that has connotations of *worship* rather than servitude: “God created His servants (or worshippers, *al-ibad*) for the purpose of worshipping Him.”³³ Padwick claims that ‘*bd*’ is close to the New Testament *doulos* and is the

²⁸ See Robert E. Speer, “The Issue Between Islam and Christianity,” in *The Moslem World of To-day* ed. John R. Mott (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 349-351 for an account of sin representative of most contemporary missionary scholarship on Islam.

²⁹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 178.

³⁰ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 178, citing *Al-Hizbu s-saif i*.

³¹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 180. Louis Massignon was critical of the tendency of traditional Western approaches to Islam to prioritise the doctrinal aspects of Islam without engaging with Islamic spirituality: “bien des Européens ont étudié les penseurs musulmans ‘du dehors’, sans entrer dans le coeur de l’Islam lui-même”. See Waardenburg, *L’Islam Dans Le Miroir de l’Occident: Comment Quelques Orientalistes Occidentaux Se Sont Penchés Sur l’Islam Et Se Sont Formé Une Image De Cette Religion* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), 231; J. Merrill, ‘Christendom and the Moslem World’ in *The Moslem World of To-Day*, ed J.R. Mott (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 117-120.

³² Submissive obedience to a master, expressed in religious practice.

³³ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 3, citing *Wirdu’s-sahr*, Muṣṭafa al-Bakrī. This contrasts with early twentieth century missionary accounts of Islam as the religion of the submissive downtrodden

word that illustrates the worshipper “glorifying in the relationship with something of that passion of devotion with which St Paul declared himself the slave of Christ”.³⁴ She cited Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī’s prayer: “Enough of splendour for me to be Thy slave. Enough of glory for me that Thou art my Lord. My God I have found Thee the God that I desire, make me then to be the creature that Thou desirest.”³⁵ Presenting the relationship as one of worship and adoration in Islam suggests affinity to the Christian vision of God.

II. Identifying moments of kinship in Christian and Muslim worship

Padwick’s second aim was to use the prayer manuals to point to moments where Islamic devotion and Christian worship can be shown to have more in common than was usually acknowledged.

i) Sacramental devotion

It was widely believed by missionaries that there was no place for sacramental worship in Islam due to the emphasis on the transcendence of God and its concern to avoid the sin of *shirk*. Moreover, Evangelical missionaries were suspicious of the superstitions in popular traditions amongst Muslims and Christians. They believed that folklore obscured the truth of the Gospel and became a distraction to the centrality of the Word in Protestant Christianity.³⁶ In the world of “popular” piety Padwick identifies “sacramentals, things and actions and especially words, which are

worshipper. In *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, Hendrik Kraemer observed that “man is a mere slave (‘abd) who has to do the arbitrary will of Allah”. Kraemer *The Christian Message to the non-Christian World* (London 1938), 233.

³⁴ Padwick *Muslim Devotions*, 5.

³⁵ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. al-Ḥusayn Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, b. 543/1149. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 5, citing *Lawāmi‘u ‘l-bayyināt*, Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī.

³⁶ Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 49.

outward signs of inward grace”.³⁷ Notwithstanding Islam’s doctrine of *tawhid* and its simplification of ritual and worship, Padwick recalls an important sense of the “sacramental” that resonates with Christian sacramental traditions.³⁸ Her particular interest was in how sacramental Islam developed through the prayers.

One example, to which Padwick returns repeatedly in the book, is the utterance or calling down of *baraka*, which Padwick translates as blessedness. *Baraka* denotes a kind of power attached to personalities, most importantly that of the Prophet. Padwick uses the prayer manuals’ appeal to the sacramental to show more of the “human” face of Islam, drawing attention to practices such as the handing of a book or chalice to a novice upon initiation into a Sufi order, Padwick suggests that there are possible equivalents in Christian sacramental tradition and highlights the blurred nature of the inter-religious boundaries in popular piety. By way of example Padwick describes how Muslim women living in Old Cairo would visit the Greek Orthodox Church in the neighbourhood because a chain found there, once reputed to have had a connection with St George, was believed to bring *baraka*.³⁹

The *basmala* introduces the central part of the prayer-rite and is also emphasized by Padwick to highlight the sacramental colour of Islam. It is the opening phrase attached to every sura of the Qur’ān. *Bismi ʾllāhi ʾr-rahmāni ʾr-rahīm* is usually translated: “In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate”. It is

³⁷ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xxv.

³⁸ In traditional Christian perspective, the distinction between sacraments and sacramentals is as follows: through sacraments, which are typically administered in church, grace is guaranteed independently of the disposition of the person ministering them, whereas the efficacy of sacramentals, which can be used anywhere, is not automatic but depends on the dispositions of those administering and using them. Holy Water is an example of a sacramental.

³⁹ Cragg comments on the interchangeability of *baraka* wherein Muslims find “solace or magic or protection in Coptic sanctities of place, or person, or ritual, or time”. Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (London: Mowbray, 1992), 196.

“a signing of all life” with the Name of God. Just as in Christian devotional practice, Padwick wrote, “All the events of life and the little fears of the heart are to be tamed, as it were, and made innocuous and set at rest by coming under the control of the Name”.⁴⁰ Padwick maintained that the popular usage of the *basmala* has affinities with the Christian tradition of “saining” through making the sign of the cross to bless and sanctify common acts of life. Her depiction of the Muslim peasant reciting the *basmala* before entering his house evoked “the Christian peasant of the Near East [who] will put the sign of the Cross over his house and door”.⁴¹ Drawing the reader’s attention to similar notions of the significance of the sacramental and the power of the Name in pre-Islamic Christianity she appeals to the traditions of the Desert Fathers, quoting from *The Life of St Anthony* attributed to St Athanasius: “The Blessed Anthony ... encouraged the brethren who were with him not to be terrified or to tremble at such visions as these. For, said he to them, they are only empty phantoms which perish as if they had never existed at the Name of the Cross.”⁴²

Padwick’s interest in the notion that sacramental worship might be a point of encounter between devotional life in Islam and Christianity and her appeal to the traditions of the Desert Fathers highlight the Roman Catholic influences in Padwick’s own spirituality. Early 20th century Evangelicals tended to be suspicious of the monastic tradition in both the Roman Catholic and Coptic churches. They would not have naturally looked to analogies with the traditions of the Desert Fathers as a point of encounter with Islam. However, Padwick’s study of Islamic prayer, along with her interaction with the work of Père de Foucauld and her

⁴⁰ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 95.

⁴¹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 97.

⁴² Padwick *Muslim Devotions*, 102-103.

friendship with Louis Massignon, led her to a greater appreciation of the traditions of the Desert Fathers.

Padwick's experience of Muslim devotion goes beyond the question of learning about Islam through prayer. Her experience of some of the prayers, such as the *basmala*, leads her to propose that in the *basmala* "there is nothing that a Christian cannot take upon his lips. It contains thoughts of God enshrined in the Psalms and used in Christian worship".⁴³ By suggesting that Christians might use liturgical language usually associated with Islamic worship Padwick aimed first to show the moments of kinship between the two religious traditions, and equally importantly, she sought to encourage the worship of the Eastern churches as she observed that "*ar-Rahim* is constantly found in the Eastern Christian liturgies".⁴⁴

Western Christians who had studied Islam tended to present it as a corporate religion restricted by strict canonical prayers and defined by doctrine.⁴⁵ In the chapter "On the Threshold of the Prayer-rite" Padwick describes the meaning of the *qibla* and the *mihrab*, two of the key features of a mosque, in order to highlight the importance of symbolism and spirituality in Islam.⁴⁶ She explains that in the manuals the *qibla* stands for the spiritual sense of a direction point and the *mihrab* as a place of presence, the sanctuary: the place of meeting with the divine presence. She likens the *mihrab* to the "sanctuary" in Christianity, understood as the sanctuary of His presence and which has been "spiritualised" in common Christian parlance. Evoking the descriptions of some worshippers who had described to her their experience of a

⁴³ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 103.

⁴⁴ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 103.

⁴⁵ W. A. Rice, *Crusaders of the Twentieth Century* (London: CMS, 1910); Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ: An Account of the Rapid Spread of Islam in All Parts of the Globe, the Methods Employed to Obtain Proselytes, Its Immense Press, Its Strongholds, & Suggested Means to Be Adopted to Counteract the Evil* (London: Seeley Service, 1916).

⁴⁶ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 55-59.

mihrab of the heart, Padwick refers to the Muslim need for private communion with the divine. Here again we see how her experience of Muslim piety inspired her Christian devotion as she inferred that Muslims like Christians have need of personal prayer and find their strength in “an inner sanctuary like St Teresa’s ‘little cell’”.⁴⁷ She translates a prayer to illustrate the similarities: “Make us those in whose hearts is written the record of the awe of Thee, till the secret tongues of those hearts whisper to Thee with the long-drawn-out *miserere* of their solitude in the *mihrahs* of the holy fear of the lowly-hearted.”⁴⁸

The allusions that Padwick made to the Muslim quest for approaches to the divine are illustrative of Cragg’s description of how she “takes note of Christian parallels and contrasts as she presents the themes, but in incidental ways leaving the comprehensive issues for others”.⁴⁹ In this way the sense of *praeparatio evangelica*⁵⁰ surfaces in Padwick’s comments as she implied how Christianity might, in Gairdner’s words, “cure the maladies and fill the voids created by Islam”.⁵¹ Padwick was never as explicit as Gairdner, but the content and tone of the Islamic excerpts that she chose to expound focus on the relationship between the believer and the divine and seem to nudge the reader towards the idea that Christianity can fulfill Islam.

⁴⁷ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 59.

⁴⁸ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 59, citing M. ‘Uthamān al-Mirghanī, *Faṭhu r’rasul*.

⁴⁹ Cragg, *Troubled by Truth*, 70.

⁵⁰ In his recent edited work, *The Catholic Church and the World Religions: A Theological and Phenomenological Account* (London/NY: T & T Clark International, 2011), Gavin D’Costa defines *praeparatio evangelica* as “the preparation for the Gospel” in his chapter “Catholicism and the World Religions”, 1-33. D’Costa expands on this definition grouping this approach with *semina verba* which “argued that God provided knowledge in nature and in cultures that prepared people for the truth of the Gospel, and such truth, goodness and beauty outside of Christianity are always derived causally from God’s Word. These truths were prepared the person for salvation through cultivating the good life but they were not in themselves saving revelation - which came through Christ. Such truths found their fulfilment and culmination in Christ.” (*The Catholic Church and the World Religions*, 3).

⁵¹ Gairdner, “Christianity and Islam”, 260.

ii) Tasbīh and Taqdīs

In the chapter “The Worship of Praise: Praise of Transcendence” the *tasbīh*⁵² is associated with *taqdīs*, the *uttering* of God’s holiness, also found in the Eastern liturgies. *Taqdīs* is the name given in the Arabic translation of the *trisagion* of the Greek Orthodox Liturgy and Padwick draws a comparison between the Christian form: Holy God, Holy Strong One, Holy Immortal One, which “rings through all the services of the Eastern Church”, and the Muslim: *Subbūh, quddūs, rabb, ‘l-malā’ikati wa ‘r-rūh*, “Most glorious, most transcendent, Lord of the Angels and the Spirit”.⁵³ Notwithstanding an apparent kinship between Christians and Muslims in the use of *tasbīh* and *taqdīs*, Padwick refers her reader to the book of Revelation 5:11-12⁵⁴ to highlight a primary note of difference. Although they share this experience, the Christian “comes home to a revelation of the Divine Nature that no longer leaves him a lost child in the midst of vast eternities. ‘Jesus we know and He is on the Throne.’ His Muslim brother sees the Throne and the serried ranks of angels, but the Lamb that has been slain is absent from his vision.”⁵⁵

One of the central elements of the prayer-rite, *sujūd*, prostration, is also concerned with the human in relation to the divine and is described as the act of abandon and surrender. In Western scholarship it often carries the idea of service and humiliation. Padwick’s reading of *sujūd* through the prayers presents it as “the attitude not only of penitent humiliation but of adoration. The whole creation is thus

⁵² The *tasbīh* is the name of the saying *subhāna llāhi*, “(I proclaim) the glory of God”.

⁵³ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 66.

⁵⁴ I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands; saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

⁵⁵ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 69.

said to adore God”.⁵⁶ In tones that echo the Keswick appeal to the Romantic tradition she inserted a line from a prayer about worship of the divine in creation: “Thou art He before whom the blackness of night, the light of day, the rays of the sun, the rustling of the trees, the voice of the waters make their prostration.”⁵⁷

iii) Intercession and mediation in Islamic prayer: wasila and shafā'a

Through a discussion of intercession, Padwick introduces the implication, which was mentioned above and that Padwick characteristically never fully developed, of a relationship of *praeparatio evangelica* between Islam and Christianity in which, as Gairdner depicted it, “Islam is groping after a truth which Christianity richly possesses”.⁵⁸ Here Padwick argues that Muslims, like Christians, believe in intercessory prayer and are in need of a mediator. She cites a prayer to demonstrate that Muslims believe in the need for mediation: “O God, the Lord of this completed call and of the prayer-rite now inaugurated, give to our Lord Muhammad mediation and merit and a high rank, and that praiseworthy station which Thou has promised to him.”⁵⁹

Quoting from the modern works of popular devotion Padwick highlights the extent to which the figure of the Prophet has become “more august, more numinous, in his people’s eyes”, making it “but a short step from asking God for Muhammad’s mediation to asking the Prophet himself for it”.⁶⁰ The significance of this statement

⁵⁶ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 10.

⁵⁷ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 10, citing M. ‘Uthamān al-Mirghani, *Faṭhu r-rasul*.

⁵⁸ Gairdner, “Christianity and Islam,” 241.

⁵⁹ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 37, citing *Dalā’ilu ‘l-khairāt, al-Kalimu ‘t-tayib, Faṭhu ‘r-Rasūl (from al-Bukhārī)*. The influence of Louis Massignon on Padwick’s work is apparent in her discussion of intercessory prayer. Massignon’s *Badaliya* group, established in Egypt in 1934 believed in the power of substitutionary prayer by Christians on behalf of Muslims. See Agnes Wilkins, “Louis Massignon, Thomas Merton and Mary Kahil,” *ARAM*, 20 (2008): 355-373.

⁶⁰ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 44.

should not be missed. Aware that the sin of *shirk* is “the dread and abomination” of Islam, Padwick suggests nonetheless that the praying heart of Islam sees “in Muhammad something more than mere man”. The notion that the Muslim’s turning to Muhammad implies a desire for a Christ-like form of mediation is left for the reader to contemplate: “Our Lord Muhammad, I have approached my Lord through thee in this my need that is to be met”.⁶¹

These are just some of the examples found in *Muslim Devotions* of how, through her reading of the prayers, Padwick challenges the interpretation of Islam found in early 20th century Western scholarship and implied that a deeper more fruitful missionary encounter might be gained through prayer. The final section of this essay will attempt to draw out the implications of Padwick’s study for her ideas concerning the future of Christian mission in the Muslim world.

III. Muslim Devotions: an inspiration for Christianity in the Muslim world

i) Language

Engaging with Muslim prayers heightened Padwick’s sensitivity to the richness of Islamic Arabic, which she claimed distinguished it from Christian Arabic and led to misunderstandings. The two forms of Arabic meant that the Christian message was obstructed by a language that sounded unfamiliar and awkward to Muslim ears. As she put it in an essay discussing the future of Christian mission: “we are faced with the fact that the religious Arabic of Islam and the religious Arabic of Christianity have become two languages. And this dichotomy is the more confusing because to a

⁶¹ Ibid.

great extent both use the same vocabulary with meanings that have grown further and further apart”.⁶²

Padwick’s belief that Protestant Christian Arabic lacked any sophistication came out of her experience of the recent, largely Protestant, missionary translations of the Bible that she was reading. She was, for example, particularly critical of the language of the Van Dyck Bible.⁶³ In reports to both the Nile Mission Press and the International Missionary Council she suggested that the translations emerging out of the Protestant missionary presses reflected a simple language that would not resonate with Muslim expectations of the kind of sophisticated religious language found in Islam.

In light of the unfamiliar language of the Van Dyck translation Padwick observed that Arabic Christian converts, who had learnt their Christian lexicon from the language of the Beirut Bible, spoke an entirely different religious language to their Muslim neighbours. She remarked that this contrast between the two religions’ use of Arabic was most noticeable to foreign Christian Arabists: those “who read at all fully Muslim religious literature and pass from that to Christian are at once aware

⁶² Padwick, “North African Reverie,” *International Review of Missions* XXVII (1938), 346. Commenting on this problem of the differences between Muslim and Christian Arabic, Kenneth Cragg notes that “the contrast between the expression of Islamic and Christian spirituality in the Arabic language has never yet been adequately faced still less overcome” (*The Arab Christian*, 264-266, quoting from 265). In a discussion on Ecclesiastical Arabic Sidney Griffith argues that as early as the eighth century classical Arabic was used for translations of classical texts, Scriptures and other liturgical texts of the Church indicating the extent to which the by then Islamicized Arabic language remained an important ecclesiastical language as well (*The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2008), 48-53).

⁶³ The translators of the Van Dyck Bible, which was completed in 1865 and soon became the standard Arabic Bible used by missionary societies, opted for a simple linguistic style that stood in stark contrast to the elaborate and sophisticated language of the Qur’ān. Published at the beginning of the revival of Standard Arabic as a literary language, many of the terms coined in the Van Dyck Bible did not actually enter into common use. In borrowing from Syriac and distancing itself from the language of the Qur’ān, the translation tended to use religious terminology that Muslims and other non-Christians would not understand.

of the acute difference of flavour, not only spiritual and ethical, but linguistic”. She maintained that in terms of missionary strategies for conveying the Gospel to Muslims, these new Arab Christians whose “whole education has been steeped in the language of the Beyrout Bible translation, hallowed by all the Christian memories of their lives”,⁶⁴ required a different kind of “Muslim” lexicon if they were to hold a meaningful discussion about Christianity with Muslim friends. They were, she maintained, “sublimely unconscious of any difficulty here and in evangelistic work will talk in Christian religious Arabic, unaware that their words are conveying meanings far other than those in their own minds”.⁶⁵ Her argument was confirmed by Louis Massignon, who, Padwick cited following one of his visits to the Literature Bureau in Cairo. Massignon had emphasized the need to “somehow escape from the tricks of Christian Arabic into an Arabic in which a Muslim or a new Christian from Islam could feel at home”.⁶⁶

The point was illustrated in *Muslim Devotions* through a discussion of the word *khaṭiʿa* and the different interpretations of the word for “sin” in the different forms of Arabic. While Christian Arabic has tended to use one word, *khaṭiʿa*, to translate “sin”, Islamic Arabic has several. Padwick cites a long list of Islamic Arabic words for sin and analyses them: sin as evil; as wrongdoing; as guilt; as self-wronging; the entail of sin; sin as disobedience; as error; as flaw, defect, and shame; as excess, prodigality; and sins of omission.⁶⁷ According to Padwick this has led to misunderstandings of Christianity by Muslims. The root meaning of *khaṭiʿa* is

⁶⁴ Padwick, “North African Reverie,” 347.

⁶⁵ Padwick, “North African Reverie,” 346-347.

⁶⁶ Constance Padwick, IMC Archives RG 85, Box 9 26.56.07 Fiche 4, Secretary’s Report to Literature Committee March 1935.

⁶⁷ Padwick mentions the Arabic words: *sharra*, *adhnaba*, *jarama*, *athima*, *ḡalama*, *janā ‘alā*, ‘*aṣā*, *khaṭiʿa*, ‘*athara*, ‘*āba*, *asrafā*, *taḡṣīr*, *nisyān*, *nuḡṣān*, *tark* (*Muslim Devotions*, 189-197).

“error”, missing the mark; the same word as the Hebrew *hata’*, which is used in the Old Testament.

When *hata’* is translated into Greek in the New Testament the word *hamartano* is used. However, in the New Testament *hamartano* has a wider meaning than “error” and carries a graver ethical significance than *hata’*. These nuances were not recognised by the Arabic translators, who sought a translation for *hamartano* in its literal sense and *khaṭi’ā* became the predominant word for “sin” in Christian Arabic. However, in other forms of Arabic the meaning is more restricted. Warning that this may cause Arab Christians to “give the wrong impression to their Muslim friends” Padwick claims that the fact that it means simply making a mistake is “insufficiently remembered by Christians who use the word with a wider and deeper meaning”.⁶⁸

Writing to the Literature Committee of the International Missionary Council in 1929 Padwick regretted that “in Arabic the literature of Christian prayer has not reached the nobility of language that one would wish”.⁶⁹ The experience of the sanctity of language used for Muslim prayers had convinced her of the need for more Christian translations that would present an equally sophisticated style of language with an equivalent gravitas and holiness to the Arabic of Islam.⁷⁰ Her

⁶⁸ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 195.

⁶⁹ Constance Padwick, IMC Archives RG 85 Box 9.26.56.07 Fiche 3, Report to Interim Literature Committee 1929.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the debates concerning translation, linguistics and use of colloquial as well as standard and classical Arabic see Heather J. Sharkey, “Muslim Apostasy, Christian Conversion, and Religious Freedom in Egypt: A study of American Missionaries, Western Imperialism, and Human Rights Agendas,” in *Proselytisation Revisited: Rights, Free Markets, and Culture Wars*, ed. Rosalind I. J. Hackett (London: Equinox, 2008), 139-166; and “American Missionaries, the Arabic Bible, and Coptic Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” in *American Missionaries in the Middle East: Foundational Encounters*, eds Heather J. Sharkey and Mehmet Ali Dogan (Utah: University of Utah Press, 2011).

experience of worship in the Coptic Church suggested to her that the liturgies of Egypt's indigenous church might answer this need.

ii) Christian Devotion

As well as calling for richer, more nuanced Christian translations of the Bible, Padwick also informed the missionary societies that *more* Christian literature of devotions and prayers was essential to missionary work amongst Muslims. Inspired by a remark from Gairdner that “the lack of reverence, concentration and awe shown in Christian prayer (compared to Islam) is bad for mission to Islam,”⁷¹ Padwick regularly wrote of the need for different types of devotional literature in Arabic in order to cater for different tastes – for women, young people, the semi-literate and children.⁷²

Aware of how her experience of Islam had been enriched by an encounter with the prayers of the religion, Padwick claimed that the same would be true for the Muslim enquirer. Padwick became convinced of the need to offer Muslims the experience of the richness of the Christian devotional tradition. The task for Christian missions was to present the Muslim with the “inner world” of Christian popular devotion and spirituality. In an essay on this topic published in 1938 she wrote: “Perhaps we who seek to live for Christ in these lands that have produced the innumerable Muslim *isti’adhat* should make more use of the hymns and prayers of the early centuries of Christianity when she lived in a magic-haunted demon-ridden world.”⁷³ She went on to suggest that the hymn “St Patrick’s Breastplate” was the

⁷¹ Gairdner, “Christianity and Islam,” 273.

⁷² Padwick’s particular interest in developing Christian literature for the barely literate, namely women and children, grew during her time working for the Nile Mission Press (1916-1921), when she was employed to establish their children’s literature department.

⁷³ Constance Padwick, “I take refuge in God,” *The Moslem World* XXVII (1938): 384.

kind of popular devotional work that presented a Christian equivalent to the traditions of the prayer books.

Padwick's experience of Muslim devotion informed her theology of mission to Islam as she worked to produce more Christian devotions in Arabic. Amongst other sources, she drew on the work of the 13th century martyr Raymond Lull. Lull's Sufi-inspired works of Christian contemplation and devotion were a source of great inspiration to Padwick; so much so that she travelled to Paris to try and persuade Massignon to translate them into Arabic. Reflecting once again her Catholic sensibilities, Padwick also worked on translations of Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God* and *The Imitation of Christ*. In 1935 she sought permission from her committee to work with a convert who had formerly been a sheikh of one of the Dervish orders to write "a Christian 'Wird', a book of prayers that we can put into the hands of those that are beginning in the Christian life of prayer".⁷⁴

iii) Cooperation with the indigenous churches

As well as inspiring Padwick to call for more Christian devotional literature and to consider the different linguistic styles available, Muslim devotion prompted her to endorse the worship and liturgy of the Eastern churches. The popular prayers and traditions of the manuals reminded her of similar traditions in some of the Eastern churches, which she believed should be encouraged and supported by the missionary societies. The five daily prayers in positions of kneeling and prostration reminded Padwick of the ancient traditions of prayer and worship of the Eastern churches.

⁷⁴ Constance Padwick, IMC Archives RG 85, Box 9, 26.56.07 Fiche 4, Secretary's Report to Literature Committee March 1935.

In her discussion of *sujūd* Padwick regrets that some of the Christian communities in Muslim lands “are becoming like the pew-bound West, and as they tend to lose their freedom of expression in worship lose with it the help of prostration so eloquent of lowly adoration”.⁷⁵ Once again Padwick sought to encourage her Evangelical reader to appreciate the traditions of the Eastern churches. In line with the missionary theory of earlier Evangelical missionaries like CMS Honorary Secretary, Henry Venn (1725-1797), Padwick believed that the Western missionary organisations should see themselves as a temporary presence in the Middle East. Their objective should be to build up the churches of the East in order to hand over the responsibility of the evangelism of Egypt to Egypt’s indigenous Christians. As she wrote in her biography of her colleague Gairdner, “The Church Missionary Society in Egypt has always tried to be a mission of help to the Coptic Church...winning back Moslems to the ancient national Church, and baptizing them into her membership”.⁷⁶

Padwick’s experience of sacramental expression and blessing found in many of the prayer manuals had emphasized the centrality of the prayer of calling down blessing on the Prophet: the *tasliya: sal’atu ‘al’a ‘n-nab’i*. As she considered the place of the Eastern churches amid Islam the *tasliya* served as a prompt to the Christian Church in the Muslim world. She suggests that where “the *tasliya* is on every lip from morning to night”, the Church should “hearten herself with greater use of ejaculations of praise...[and] restore the *Hosanna*; the joy-cry which is the closest equivalent to the *tasliya*” to Christian worship.⁷⁷ The Church is thus called to revive

⁷⁵ Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 11.

⁷⁶ Padwick, *Temple Gairdner of Cairo* (London: SPCK, 1929), 264.

⁷⁷ Padwick *Muslim Devotions*, 165.

its ancient traditions and establish a confident Christian presence in the midst of Islam.⁷⁸

To conclude, since its publication, *Muslim Devotions* has largely been received as a study of Islamic piety. Writing shortly after its publication the phenomenologist of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith described Padwick as a pioneer who had provided a way for the open-minded Western reader to “enter into the devotion of men’s hearts”.⁷⁹ The scholar of Islamic mysticism, Anne Marie Schimmel, welcomed *Muslim Devotions* as an important early scholarly account of Islamic mysticism and a way in which to engage “deeply in the mystery of prayer”.⁸⁰ The reading of *Muslim Devotions* presented in this essay is different. By reading *Muslim Devotions* through the lens of Padwick’s Evangelical vocation to mission amongst Muslims I have sought to demonstrate how her study of Muslim prayer became a part of her missionary project. Padwick’s engagement with Muslim popular piety not only led her to a greater appreciation of Islamic spirituality, it also gave her a greater appreciation of the devotion and spirituality of Christian traditions other than her own. Through this experience Padwick’s ideas for the future of missions in the Muslim world were changed.

Formed by the prevailing Evangelical tradition of the epoch - one that emphasized an affective and emotive “religion of the heart” - Padwick was drawn to Islam’s mystical tradition. This was because she wanted to focus upon the “warm and personal” side of Islam and thereby align it as a sibling to Evangelical

⁷⁸ The exhortation to encourage the liturgy and worship of the Eastern churches reflects Padwick’s belief that Christianity in the Muslim world was dependent upon cooperation between the missionary societies and the Arab churches. This became a key component of her missionary strategy.

⁷⁹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, review of *Muslim Devotions*, by Constance Padwick, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 25 (1962): 352.

⁸⁰ Anne-Marie Schimmel, review of *Muslim Devotions*, by Constance Padwick, *Die Welt des Islams* 7 (1961): 194.

Protestantism. Her commitment to teasing out underlying similarities between the two traditions influenced the approach to mission that she developed as her study of Muslim devotions led her to encourage the missionary societies to produce more Christian devotional literature in Arabic and to give careful consideration to the kinds of biblical translations they produced. Furthermore, in addition to shaping a specific missiological approach, the Muslim prayers influenced Padwick's ideas about the future of Christianity in the Muslim world. The experience of Islamic popular piety led Padwick to exhort her colleagues to cooperate more closely with the Eastern churches in order to build up and strengthen the ancient Christian presence in the Arab world. Through an engagement with Islamic prayer Padwick was inspired to use language, devotion, and liturgy to call for a richer, bolder, and deeper Christian presence in the Muslim world.
