Christian Responses to the Political Challenge of Islam

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It seems to have become axiomatic that Islam is a religion with particular political potency. The Arabic phrase *din wa dawlah*, describing Islam as "religion and state", encapsulates what is commonly understood as the necessary interdependence of faith and politics. Before reflecting on three contemporary responses to Islam from the perspective of Christian political theology, I will provide an analysis of this pre-supposition, examining, in overview, some of the origins and trajectories of Islam's relationship to government and law.

Islam: the will-to-power?

In thinking about the political implications of Islam from its origins, a hasty projection of contemporary social structures onto seventh century Arabia must be avoided. Muhammad was bringing his message to a tribal context where *kinship* was the primary social glue.[1] The application of law and justice occurred within the bonds of extended families in which mutual obligations and responsibilities were held in common. There was no notion of a nation-state, but a solidarity that depended upon the protections that kinship afforded. Retribution was exacted through this kinship and not in a separate enforcement structure that may be described as governmental, or even monarchical. When Muhammad formed a community around himself in Medina after the pivotal emigration from Mecca, he was establishing a new kinship group: an *umma* of societal norms, laws and sanctions. Where the church is the paradigmatic society for Christians, the *umma* or "nation" around Muhammad, is the paradigmatic body of the faithful for Muslims. Thus, Muhammad ibn Maslama could say that

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[1] Watt, W. Montgomery. *Islamic Surveys 6: Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), pp. 6-9

"Islam has erased the alliances".[2] The adage that "There is no separation between religion and the state" in Islam is, in this originating context, inaccurate.

The *hijra* as the starting point of the Islamic calendar underscores the reality of Islam as a societal structure *par excellence*. As Patricia Crone has noted, "all members defended one another *as if* they were kinsmen….Muhammad created a new tribe, a super-tribe of believers".[3] The authority behind this system was nothing less than divine law: the revelation given to Muhammad in the Qur'an.[4] God's revelation was Muhammad's authorisation and legitimation. In Islam's beginnings, there is no comparable doctrine of the "secular powers", or of the divine right of kings, because Muhammad was vindicated as leader only in as much as he was presenting God's order for an ignorant humanity. Thus, right government was conceived as a wholly egalitarian enterprise; there was not the elitism of pagan kingship but a political equality before God. For Patricia Crone, the direct imposition of divine law within this perfect society draws the provocative accusation that "God was practically synonymous with the community."[5] Where the Christian faith began as a minority religion within the evident sovereignty of the Roman Empire, Islam began without any need to address the relative roles of religious and secular. A separate power structure to that of religious authority was irrelevant when God's order prevailed within the city state of Medina. Rémi Brague summarises the contrast in modern parlance by saying that "*Christianity conquered the state through civil society; Islam…conquered civil society through the state.*"[6] We may rightly baulk at the use of such contemporary terms applied to seventh century, tribal Arabia, but

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[2] Quoted in Brague, Rémi. *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 35

[3] Crone, Patricia. *God's Rule: Government and Islam, Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 13

[4] See the essay "Islam and Christianity: On 'Religions of Law'" by Damian Howard for an alternative analysis of the presumption of Islamic "legalism". Howard provides an important corrective to the typical contrast between Christianity as a religion of grace and Islam as a religion of law. While Muhammad's vocation carried a divine sanction and thus impacted the legal and societal order framed around him it will become clear that after his death there is a real question about the theoretical and practical sustainability of a complete coherence between law and religion in Islam.

[5] Crone, Patricia. *God's Rule*, p. 45

[6] Brague, Rémi. *The Law of God*, p. 37 (author's italics)

what is important to note here is the respective *trajectories* of the religions that inform their self-understanding.[7] As Seyyed Hossein Nasr says, "In the Islamic view God is the only legislator. Man has no power to make laws."[8]

The all-encompassing nature of this revelation is rooted in Islam's understanding of itself as at once both primordial and final. God's order is unchanging and has been revealed through the prophets but the Qur'an is the decisive and complete guide for humanity. The law is divine law; in the terms of Louis Gardet, a "nomocracy".[9] There is a necessary self-sufficiency in the positing of this political order. The Islamic order is the vehicle of salvation and thus totalising of all other claims to authority and revelation. Thus, the Qur'an alters accounts from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament,[10] undermining *ab initio* the veracity of Christian and Jewish sacred texts where they contradict the Qur'an.

Furthermore, there is what Kenneth Cragg sees as the notable "legitimate belligerence"[11] of Surahs revealed in the Medinan economy of political dominance. Yohanan Friedmann's analysis of the earliest Islamic attitudes to freedom of religion for other religious groups highlights the essential anthropology of the Qur'an that asserts that "Islam's immunity from abrogation is an essential component of its superiority in comparison with other religions".[12] Friedmann notes the shift in tone within surahs in the settled Medinan polity where the "People of the Book" become "infidels" deserving of humiliation.[13] What developed later into the stark division between the *umma*, the *dar al-islam* (the abode of Islam) and the *dar al-kufr* (abode of the infidel) and *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) is premised on the manifest victory associated with enacting the ordinances of the one God. Jews, Christians and

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[7] Elsewhere, Brague notes the entanglements that both Christianity and Islam had with empire: "Christianity because it inherited one, and Islam because it gained one by conquest." *The Law of God*, p. 121

[8] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 3rd Edn., (London: Aquarian, 1994), p. 106

[9] Gardet, Louis. *La Cité Musulmane: Vie sociale et politique*, 3rd Edn., (Paris: Vrin, 1981), p. 28

[10] Supremely, for Christians, accounts of Jesus in the Qur'an deny his crucifixion, see Surah IV: 157

[11] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Qur'an and the West* (London: Melisende, 2006), p. 10

[12] Friedmann, Yohanan. *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 26

[13] Friedmann, Yohanan. *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*, pp. 34-53

polytheists cannot but be marginal and declining minorities when living within such an Islamic polity. As Sidney Griffith observes "not only did Muslims rule, and their Arabic language become the medium of public discourse, but also the public space, the cityscape, the landscape, and the public institutions all conspired to display the public culture of Islam in its formative period."[14] Even allowing for an interpretation of *dhimmitude* as "protection" afforded to Christians and Jews by Islam, the formative shape of Islamic polity inexorably undermined any sense of their being citizens on an equal footing with Muslims.[15] Interestingly, Fred Donner's research suggests that the first two hundred years of Islam presented a rather more inclusive cast to Islamic polity. Rather than there being the self-definition of "Islam", a term which only began to be used to denote a religious observance distinct from other monotheists in the early second century after Muhammad, the prophet had inaugurated what should more properly be described as a "monotheistic reform movement" that incorporated Christians, Jews and other monotheists.[16] Donner, in describing this earlier ecumenically minded "believers movement", recognises the ensuing hardening of Islam into a separate and exclusive faith as demonstrated by Friedmann. What is perhaps significant in Donner's thesis for this study is that a pristine Islamic polity is probably illusory. Even in the Medinan Constitution, which Donner prefers to call the "Umma Document", there is an explicit recognition of certain Jewish families as fellow "believers" within the *umma*, though following a different law to that of the Qur'an.[17]

Donner's analysis points to formative Islam being able to accommodate variegated religious "laws" in the establishment of an Islamic polity. The early, pragmatic religious alliances

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[14] Griffith, Sidney. *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 14
[15] Griffith, Sidney. *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, p. 16
[16] Donner, Fred. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010)
[17] Donner, Fred. *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 72-4. Donner uses this description because the "Constitution" established guidelines for collaboration between various tribes in Medina rather than a comprehensive, political treatise

suggested by Donner undermine the idea that Islam ever was able to proffer a monolithic politico-religious system in anything but ideal. However, even recognising a more inclusive cast to the community of Islam, the religious significance of the political community prevails, such that polytheists are decidedly excluded.[18] When one notes the paucity of material within the Qur'an that might furnish a comprehensive legal system, there is clearly scope for a wide range of perspectives on what constitutes Islamic politics even for this high-water mark of Islamic dominance under the rule of the prophet. Perhaps the fundamental question to be posed to the Islamic vision of politics and society in the light of the political power that shapes its originating story, then, is what space is given to the "other", the "outsider". Is there, indeed, any sense in which genuinely equal citizenship pertains in an Islamic polity? A concomitant challenge to the formative Islamic vision, too, is what the political implications are for Islam when in a minority situation. When, currently, approximately one quarter of all Muslims is outside what could be termed the *dar al-Islam*, what does Islam have to say about their politico-religious ethic?[19]

The challenge of diversity to the simple and monolithic Medinan ideal became all too apparent at the death of the prophet. There had been no obvious thought to succession at his death, which had come suddenly, and so there was no messenger of God's revelation to bind the community under law.[20] Fractures that would become decisive in the ensuing breach between Sunni and Shi'a were already materialising at the prophet's death. The competing questions were whether succession was to be decided by consultation (*shura*: a concept that has come to be developed as a basis for Islamic democracy[21]), the charisma of the "living law" of the imam by family line, "spiritual excellence", or the designation of the prophet or

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[18] Donner, Fred. *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 58-9
[19] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Qur'an and the West*, p. 5, footnote 2
[20] See Watt, W. Montgomery. *Islamic Surveys 6: Islamic Political Thought*, pp.31-45
[21] See especially Mawdudi, Syed Abu'l A'la. *Islamic Law and Constitution*, edited by Khurshid Ahmad, (Karachi: Jamaat-e-Islami Publications, 1955). Here, the *sharia* of Islam is a sufficient basis for a modern constitution and authority is vested in the people as a whole not in a single caliph or imam

succeeding caliphs. As Islam spread, the pragmatic realities of providing guidance from the law involved an inevitable dispersion of authority such that, what was already in process at the death of Muhammad was a *fait accompli* by the end of the rule of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in 661. Patricia Crone goes as far as stating that the death of Muhammad and expansion of Islam precipitated a *de-politicisation* of religious identity and leadership. Where Christianity's origins brought it into a repeated debate about the relationship between church and state, Islam's origins have presented a persistent challenge about the "nature and function of the leadership of the *umma*".[22] Donner's perspective would suggest that during Muhammad's lifetime the supposed fusion of religion and politics had a more ecumenical and pragmatic hue than that characterised by Crone. However, the binding force for the community of believer's was, in both understandings, the divinely ordered mandate of the prophet: a society under God.

It is against this backdrop that the diversity of contemporary forms of Islamic political engagements is configured. With an impulse towards a fusion of the political with the religious, there is yet a dilemma as to *who* the weighty authorisation of the divine law is invested in and *how* this is to be structured in concrete terms.[23] It should be no surprise, then, that, beyond the Medinan Constitution (or Umma Document), and its limitations, an ideal model of Islamic governance should be elusive. Many Muslims are confidently questioning the relevance of the paradigm of political Islam and relativizing the pattern of *din wa dawlah* in the light of contemporary diversity and the nation-state. Mohammed Arkoun draws a distinction between Islam-as-fact from Qur'an-as-fact. The former represents the state appropriation of religion, an inappropriate and ahistorical abuse of Islamic theology, according to Arkoun. The latter is embodied in a classical, Islamic tradition of bringing Qur'anic principles to bear in relation to scientific and political thinking in historical and

[22] Crone, Patricia. *God's Rule*, p. 16
[23] See Remi Brague who refers to the "overabundance of legitimacy that it made available" creating the conundrum of deciding "who was the beneficiary of that legitimacy", *The Law of God*, p. 81

geographical context.[24] An-Na'im might be indicative of Qur'an-as-fact in proposing a reformation of the *sharia* so as to present an Islamic basis for universal human rights.[25] Farid Esack responds to the question of authorisation in Islam by using the Qur'an as a manifesto for a preferential option for the poor and the oppressed much as Christian liberation theologians began to do in the interaction with Marxism in the 1960s.[26] Tariq Ramadan has famously sought a reconfiguration of the dichotomies of *dar-al-Islam* and *dar-al-harb*. For him, the pre-Medinan sense of Islam being a minority community as *dar-al-dawa*, abode of invitation, is much more pertinent to modern self-identity and peaceful co-existence.[27] Even within Islamist groups, there are efforts at revisionism such that *dhimmitude* is superseded by citizenship as the most appropriate framework within which to view cooperative life with non-Muslims in an Islamic state.[28]

Alongside Islamic political approaches more conducive to plurality and contemporary understandings of religious freedom, and arguably constitutive of marginal status in relation to mainstream Islam, there are the more obviously totalising approaches of *Wahhabism*, purportedly limiting law to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Within this vision, the *ulama*, the religious leadership, are integral to governance, though *in practice,* as in Saudi Arabia, there are many areas of separation between the secular and the religious.[29] Sayyid Qutb's Islamic revivalism similarly seeks a return to the purity of *sharia*, and proclaims the illegitimacy of all other forms of government but presents this in terms that borrow from the dialectics of Marxism. Rachel Scott's study of Islamist groups in contemporary Egypt reveals a very fluid

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[24] Arkoun, Mohammed. "Islam, Europe, the West: Meanings-at-Stake and the Will-to-Power." In, *Defining Islam: A Reader*, edited by Andrew Rippin, (London: Equinox Publishing, 2007): 252-65
[25] An-Na'im, `Abdullahi Ahmed. *Towards an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law* (new York: Syracuse University Press, 1990)
[26] Esack, Farid. *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997)
[27] Ramadan, Tariq. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 72-5
[28] See Scott, Rachel M. *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) for her analysis of the diversity of Islamist approaches within contemporary Egypt
[29] See Esposito, John. *Islam: the Straight Path* (New York/London: Oxford University Press, 1991)

interaction of conservative political groupings with models of governance inherited from western democracies.[30] The resultant diversity within such groups "counteracts the assumption-often reinforced by Islamism itself-that Islamism is a rigid ideology that seeks to apply a fixed and transhistorical body of law."[31] According to Asma Afsaruddin, the very concept of "the Islamic State", as espoused by Qutb and Mawdudi, is a myth both distorting historical fact whilst masking an appropriation of contemporary political constructs.[32] The nuanced realities of Islamist groups together with the "Islamic secularism" of the likes of Afsaruddin, projecting democratic ideals as intrinsic to Islam, give the lie to simplistic categorisations. The picture would rather support Reza Pankhurst's contention that the binary analysis of "Islam and the West", which effectively upholds an idealized democratic system as the counterpoint to political Islam, is untenable. Pankhurst suggests that both democratic and Islamic ideological discourses too often obscure the necessary practical dialogues of representation, freedom and accountability within Islamic polities.[33]

Perhaps the vital question for Islamic politics is not what system represents the original vision best, a trail that seems elusive and invariably collapses into a debate about majority or minority status, but how the respective Islamic traditions can afford a vision of the common good: full citizenship. The *persistence* of the will-to-power in Islamic discourse, given its evident diversity, means that the politico-theological challenge of Islam remains a vital issue. As Christian Troll has observed, "only when and insofar as the premodern concept of government", what he refers to as "ideologies of unification and harmonization", is

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[30] See also, Baker, Raymond William. *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003)

[31] Scott, Rachel M. *The Challenge of Political Islam*, p. 190

[32] Afsaruddin, Asma. "The 'Islamic State': Genealogy, Facts, and Myths", *Journal of Church & State*, Volume 48, No. 1 (Winter 2006): 153-73. See also, Pankhurst, Reza. "Muslim Contestations over Religion and the State in the Middle East", *Political Theology*, Volume 11, No. 6 (December 2010): 826-45 which juxtaposes the arguments for an Islamic state against those for an Islamic vision of democratic participation. According to Reza, within Sunni Islam at least, the Islamic state is not necessary but nor should Muslims be obliged to shoe-horn their political vision within democratic ideals

[33] Pankhurst, Reza. "Muslim Contestation over Religion and the State in the Middle East", *Political Theology*, Volume 11, No. 6 (2010): 826-845

absolutely rejected, can human dignity and freedom be expected on Islamic terms.[34] It is

perhaps beside the point to judge what is the authentically "Islamic" vision of polity. Rather,

in the light of the schisms and diversities that have been apparent since the origins of Islam, it

seems that there are persistent problems with the claim to a simple equation of the religious

and the political. These are problems that present questions as to *how* the religious impacts

the political, on what basis legal authority is exacted, what the status of minority groups is,

and whether there is an understanding of the political that can reckon with powerlessness, or

be fully submitted to a transcendent God in the exercise of absolute power.

Kenneth Cragg: *Khilafa*, and Dominion

Kenneth Cragg was born in 1913 and became a missionary-scholar of Islam whose influence

on Anglican Christian-Muslim relations has brought him comparison as the "Louis

Massignon of Anglicanism".[35] Cragg's seminal 1956 work *The Call of the Minaret* was alert

to the challenges of the political vision of Islam in relation to Christianity.[36] That Muhammad

was "from the outset its Constantine as well as its Prophet" marks out the *hijra* as the

decisive and defining moment for political Islam.[37] The Islamic order is ordained by God

"because it stands under God's law" but this seeming statement of fact obscures the pressing

need to be able to interpret and apply this law.[38] An impulse exists for the polity to be

Islamic, but the formative struggles over succession and authority continue to this day: "Islam

demands the entire allegiance of the believer and the state should insure as best as it may that

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[34] Troll, Christian. *Dialogue & Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), p. 74

[35] Brown, Christopher. "Kenneth Cragg on Shi'a Islam and Iran: An Anglican Theological Response to Political Islam", *Aram*, Volume 20 (2008): 375-391, p. 378. See Christopher Lamb's *The Call to Retrieval: Kenneth Cragg's Christian Vocation to Islam*, (London: Grey Seal, 1997) for a theological account of Kenneth Cragg's legacy

[36] See Brown, Christopher. "Kenneth Cragg on Shi'a Islam and Iran: An Anglican Theological Response to Political Islam", *ARAM*, 20 (2008): 375-391, for an overview of Cragg's political theology: "Cragg believes that religious faith could and should renounce all power-complex and physical militancy without abandoning political duties.", p. 390

[37] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*, 1964 Edn., (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 256

[38] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 161

those demands are satisfied… Beyond that there is division."[39] That the Medinan moment seems so decisive a departure for Cragg might be contradicted by Fred Donner's understanding of an early monotheistic reform movement that encompassed Jews and Christians even in Medina. However, in Cragg's analysis the Medinan turn is at least a *motif* for the political claims of Islam, with the Meccan origins as emblematic of the call to true worship. When Cragg juxtaposes the Meccan religious vision as foil to Medina, he is effectively articulating Donner's understanding of the believers movement's mission. As Donner says, "The social dimensions of the message are undeniable and significant, but they are incidental to the central notions of the Qur'an, which are religious: Belief in the one God and righteous behaviour as proof of obedience to God's will."[40]

It is from within this religious minding that Cragg seeks to "retrieve" the Christ lost to Islam. This demands a responsive elucidation of the Christian faith to an Islam that otherwise judges the Church to be "jejune, effete, misguided, and discredited."[41] Thus, the incarnation, properly understood as the *sacramentalising* of all physical life, can speak to an Islam concerned about the outward impact of religious faith. It is in the vision of a sacramentalised whole life that the influences of the Anglican *Lux Mundi* movement on Cragg's political theology can be discerned.[42] In the *kenosis* of God, the twin truths of a graced created order

[39] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 162
[40] Donner, Fred. *Muhammad and the Believers*, p. 89
[41] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 248
[42] *Lux Mundi* was the title of a collection of essays published in 1889 by a number of liberal Catholic Anglican scholars. *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, ed. Charles Gore, 10th edn (London: John Murray, 1909). It sought to respond to the challenges of modern biblical scholarship and found a binding theme for this task, made explicit in Gore's sub-title, in the doctrine of the incarnation. As a commemorative collection of essays some one hundred years later notes, there is evident diversity within the essays of *Lux Mundi* and by no means does each essay seek to theorise on the doctrine of the incarnation, but there is at least a claim that "'the Incarnation' is constitutive of the identity of the Christian religion". See *The Religion of the Incarnation: Anglican Essays in Commemoration of Lux Mundi*, ed. Robert Morgan, (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), p. xiii. It is noteworthy that Kenneth Cragg's D.Phil. research on Islam in the 20th Century and the response of Christian theology to its challenge was conducted while he was Rector of Longworth, Oxford, the site of the gathering of the original *Lux Mundi* authors, Cragg, Kenneth. Faith and Life Negotiate: A Christian Story-Study, (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1994), pp. 50-58. See also, Maeland, Bård. "The Plural Significance of Jerusalem as Seen Ex Infra: Kenneth Cragg on the Interrelated Jerusalem." In, *Christianity and Jerusalem: Studies in Modern Theology and Politics in the Holy Land*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony, (Leominster: Gracewing, 2010): 245-264. As Maeland states, "the crux in Cragg's interreligious approaches to Islam and

and a necessarily vulnerable creator inform Cragg's response to political Islam. The radical "called-out" community of believers speaks of the need for a redeemed society and not an internalised, individualistic gospel. However, a realistic assessment of the pervasive power of sin would guard against an idealism that might expect this order to be perfected in external terms. The retrieval of Christ to Muslims resonates with the spiritual challenge characteristic of Muhammad's Meccan vocation: the reform of religious life from a position of powerlessness.[43]

In defending the classic Christian inheritance of the doctrine of the two,[44] Cragg does not describe *how* church and temporal powers are to negotiate their respective responsibilities and opens himself up to the charge of pietism and naivety. As a Muslim critic of Cragg's work has observed:

> "Christianity wishes to leave unto Caesar what is Caesar's. In the absence of Christian guidance, a Christian ruler will follow not Christ but Machiavelli, whereas Islamic guidance to a ruler is as imperative as it is to one who prays and fasts."[45]

Cragg's dilemma is to express something of the political *implications* of the Christian faith at the same time as honouring a Christian suspicion of the power-equation. In *Christianity in World Perspective*, Cragg draws a clear distinction between the "creative trusteeship" of the

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Judaism is located in 'love who suffers', which is risked in all its divine vulnerability as causd by 'real evil'", p. 258. Also, Brown, Christopher. "Kenneth Cragg on Shi'a Islam and Iran": "it is clear that the Lux Mundi essay by Charles Gore on the doctrine of Kenosis…played a considerable part in his theological understanding. This concept, which incorporated the suffering of the Spirit within humanity recurs in Cragg's thinking through many of his books", p. 376

[43] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*, pp. 319-31

[44] See O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 82-119. The "doctrine of the two" describes the high tradition of political theology epitomised by St. Augustine that asserts the presence of two kingdoms of social rule to which God's people are simultaneously called to account: the kingdom of God's rule of love and that of the "secular" founded on coercion. These realms are both separate yet overlapping, the challenge of political theology one of discerning the implications of the eschatological fulfilment of God's rule for the temporal rule of the secular: "Proclaiming the unity of God's rule in Christ is the task of Christian witness; understanding the duality is the chief assistance rendered by Christian reflection", p. 82

[45] From a critical review of *The Call of the Minaret* by the Pakistani scholar Hamidullah, quoted in Lamb, Christopher. *The Call to Retrieval,* p. 86

Church and the "custodian-mind"[46] of other religious communities. The Church itself is a body politic turned outwards to a sacramental creation. By contrast, Islam betrays a tendency to a "custodian-mind" which is exclusionary and assertive.[47]

Trusteeship becomes an increasingly important motif for Cragg as he seeks to problematize the Medinan tendency (emblematic of the will-to-power) to self-assertion and exclusion. From drawing a sharp boundary between the Church's creative trusteeship, and other faiths, trusteeship is conceived as a universal vocation to humanity which can encompass Islamic self-understanding. Thus, the Qur'anic principle of *khilafa* is represented in terms akin to the Christian doctrine of humanity's dominion. Within the creation ordinance common to both scriptures, God delegates a level of sovereignty to humanity and is made accountable to God for this responsibility. God's appointment of a viceroy (*khalifa*) on the earth in surah 2:30 is, for Cragg, an opportunity for Islam to discover the inclusive vice-gerency of all humanity within the creation ordinance.[48] There is thus an appropriate realm of the "secular" that is implicit in the delegation of authority: the trusteeship of the natural order.

From this shared scriptural foundation, Christians and Muslims can begin to talk together of the mutualities of political responsibility. Cragg believes there to be "in the entire thrust of Biblical or Quranic Scripture" "the option of *khilafah*, there in the presentation to our intelligence of an intelligible world we are invited to inhabit and take up in act and will."[49] This is at once a claim on the whole of life and society of the religious, *and* an admission that the "religious" is always also bound to a higher court:

> "This, then, is the Quranic caliphate-not some political institution, organized in single
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> rulers to perpetuate Muhammad's legacy, but the whole, universal, plural dignity of

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[46] Cragg, Kenneth. *Christianity in World Perspective* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968): pp. 56-74
[47] Cragg, Kenneth. *Christianity in World Perspective*, p. 74
[48] This idea is a consistent theme throughout Kenneth Cragg's writings but is given particular attention in *The Privilege of Man: A Theme in Judaism, Islam and Christianity* (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), see Chapter II "'God is, and Man is His Caliph': A Quranic View", pp. 51-75 and *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures: Biblical and Quranic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004)
[49] Cragg, Kenneth. *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures,* p. 8

all men, as men, in their empire over things and under God. Man has no sovereignty *over* the world, except in accountability *under* God."[50]

The human's responsibility to a creator God must relativise all created orders and strive to hallow all that is created: an "autonomy thus pledged to the divine glory".[51] By prioritising this understanding of *khilafa*, the caliphate as the idealised Islamic polity becomes an inhibition to true worship. The logic is that a "reverse abrogation" to a Meccan Islam is called for.[52] With echoes of classic Augustinian theology, Cragg affirms that "God's realm, being uncoercive, is not power-ensured".[53] Cragg is, in effect, provoking Islam to prove that there must be a way to worship God without the framework of an Islamic polity. Surely, the call to worship, *Allahu Akbar*, makes a demand on every person, whatever their status and geography? As Cragg elsewhere says, "every worshipper is an iconoclast".[54] For Cragg, the very Islamic call to submission has to prioritise the Meccan call to worship over the achievement of power.

That Islam could be conceived as not being "power-ensured" raises questions about the integrity of Cragg's use of the term *khilafa* as an inclusive domain of the secular that generates plural caliphates. Within the Qur'anic text itself, the supposed creative trusteeship in Surah 2 contrasts with the Genesis account. Humanity is not tasked with naming the animals but Adam is *taught* the names by God, (Surah 2: 31). *Khilafa* in Surah 22:65 is after the fact of God's prior "dominion" of the earth and humanity has merely to ensure what has already been realised. In Genesis, humanity is given the task of subduing creation.[55] The Qur'anic pattern might be seen to offer a far more absolute notion of governance: Adam as a

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[50] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Privilege of Man*, p. 40
[51] Cragg, Kenneth. *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures*, p. 38
[52] Cragg, Kenneth. *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures*, p. 84
[53] Cragg, Kenneth. *A Certain Sympathy of Scriptures*, p. 59
[54] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in its Scripture* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), p. 73
[55] See Brague, Rémi. *The Law of God*, p. 79 for a view which disputes Cragg's rendering of khilafa

prophet receiving the law of God as the designated caliph in anticipation of ensuing prophets and ultimately the Muhammad of the Medinan Constitution.

The accusation that Cragg is christianising the Qur'an might be hard to reject but for his persistent recognition of the will-to-power within Islam.[56] Yet, there are glimpses of divine self-limiting in the Qur'an that accord with the incarnation and allow Cragg to probe the coherence of a power-ensured faith. The demurral of the angels at the conferment of dominion on Adam in Surah 2 hints at a risk taken by God: "that the Divine lordship itself is in some sense staked in the human role".[57] This is consonant with what Cragg calls "the grand perhaps" of the Qur'an: "'Perhaps you may give thanks', 'perhaps you may come to your senses', 'perhaps you may ponder and consider'".[58] In this economy, divine vulnerability can anticipate a Saviour that dies at the hands of political power. Arguably, what is most crucial to Cragg's engagement with Islamic polity is not his discussion of the respective structures of religious and secular power but his Christian convictions about the nature of the divine. A politics that is serious about the religious, for Cragg, demands a God who is not absolutely transcendent but somehow implicated in his creation, and even vulnerable to the sins of a fallen humanity. That there is enough within the Qur'an to suggest the penultimacy of temporal power and the possibility of divine restraint is confirmed by the temper of Shia martyrdom and Sufi mysticism.[59]

The belligerence and self-sufficiency that is evident in the archetype of the Medinan polity is countered in two ways, then: recognition of the pragmatic realities of the failure of religiously ordained politics, and an appeal to Islam's "surer, saner, larger mind".[60] What we have in Kenneth Cragg's political theology is a deep suspicion of the will-to-power. Faith, even, can

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[56] See Lamb, Christopher. *The Call to Retrieval*, pp. 123-49, for a summary of objections to Cragg's writings, especially from Islamic critics. For Hamidullah, Cragg offers a "sugar-coated pill", p. 123
[57] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Privilege of Man*, pp. 27-8
[58] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Privilege of Man*, p. 33
[59] Cragg, Kenneth. *God's Wrong is Most of All: Divine Capacity* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), pp. 115-6
[60] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Qur'an and the West: Some Minding Between* (London: Melisende, 2005), p. 1

become a self-deception, and in the recognition of the one God, the "surer, saner, larger mind" offers a constant rejoinder to self-satisfaction and self-legitimation. If the Muslim is "perpetually mobilised to bring about the actualisation of the absolute on earth", as al-Faruqi states, there is the internal paradox that God's unity would disqualify all absolutes.[61] Echoing Dag Hammarksjöld's sense of being "responsible *for* God", there is an "inter-liability between God and ourselves" that Cragg would see as intrinsic to true faith.[62]

In summary, then, Kenneth Cragg would seek to find *within* Islam reasons for a fully religious citizenship that can settle with minority status and a resistance to the power-equation. The Christian grounds for advocating this stress the shared dominion of humanity and the corrosiveness of power to the religious sensibility. Thus, Christendom is an aberration; the state is always to be desacralized and relativized. Dag Hammarksjöld is a frequent source of wisdom for Cragg and his "fable" of secular power seems to epitomise Kenneth Cragg's political theology:

> "once upon a time, there was a crown so heavy that it could only be worn by one completely oblivious to its glitter."[63]

From the words of a man who had reached the highest of secular offices, we have the caution that privilege can so easily distort true worship, and the hint of the kingship that only the divinely human can bear.

Pope Benedict XVI: Christian Europe and the Idealism of the Christian Nation

Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 Regensburg Lecture became controversial through an incidental quotation from a fourteenth century Byzantine emperor denouncing the violent path of Muhammad.[64] The reaction occasioned by the use of this citation obscures Pope Benedict's

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[61] Quoted in "Isma'il al-Faruqi (1921-1986)", *Troubled by Truth: Life-Studies in Inter-Faith Concern* (Durham: The Pentland Press Ltd, 1992): 127-46, p. 127
[62] Cragg, Kenneth. *The Qur'an and the West*, p. 80
[63] Hammarksjöld, Dag. *Markings*, 2006 Edn., (London: Vintage, 1964), p. 64
[64] "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." For the full text of the lecture see *Faith,*

main argument, which was utterly consistent with previous lectures of his, and in continuity with the legacy of Pope John Paul II.[65] The central premise was a statement about the Christian heritage of Europe and its importance in affording full protection to the vulnerable in a culture that was becoming forgetful of its own past. Europe's heritage, for Pope Benedict, is a fusion of faith and rationality: the Judeo-Christian temperament in creative engagement with Hellenistic philosophy. Revelation is received through the media of sacred texts and personal encounters that do not bypass the intellect but *fulfil* the capacities of a questioning and searching humanity: "A profound encounter of faith and reason is taking place here, [*in the culture of Christian Europe*] an encounter between genuine enlightenment and religion."[66] Where Kenneth Cragg seems to be embarrassed by the impact of the long legacy of Christian Europe, Pope Benedict *affirms* the Christian inheritance of Europe in its engagement with enlightenment modernity, and ultimately as a resource for engaging with Islam in an increasingly plural context.

Christianity, for Pope Benedict, has taken on "its historically decisive character in Europe"[67] through the fusion of enlightenment reason: Hellenism, and Hebraic faith. As he says in his earlier publication, *Truth and Tolerance,* as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Israel's path had attained its goal, the uninterrupted universality that was now a practical possibility. Reason and mystery had met together; the very fact that the whole had been brought together in one person had opened the door for everyone".[68] Pope Benedict has noticed a "pathological"

Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections, dated Tuesday 12th September 2006, downloaded from: http://vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/206/september/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20060912_university_regensburg_en.html on 15th February 2011

[65] See O'Mahony, Anthony. "The Vatican and Europe: Political Theology and Ecclesiology in Papal Statements from Pius XII to Benedict XVI", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Volume 9, No. 3 (August 2009): 177-194, for an outline of papal attitudes to the "Idea of Europe" over the last two centuries

[66] Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University*, p. 3

[67] Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University*, p. 4

[68] Ratzinger, Joseph. *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 156

"Western self-hatred"[69] that would undermine the inheritance of Christian values. The undermining of this inheritance has two effects: to diminish and truncate the public role of Christianity, and to render Europe prey to totalitarianism. The Christian faith has been truncated by a process of "dehellenization" since the Enlightenment period, splintering faith from reason and thereby depriving it of public potency.[70] When the Christian faith diminishes in public force, "ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity".[71]

Daniel Maher analyses Pope Benedict's Regensburg speech in the light of his 2005 encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* to suggest that the pope's understanding of reason enables a level of self-criticism and plurality that secularised and Islamic discourses tend to foreclose.[72] For Pope Benedict, the presence of Islam poses especial problems with this prospect of a fragmented Europe, unable to make public judgments. The hard secularism that truncates the Christian faith nullifies the Church's ability to publicly condemn faith-based coercion and violence and renders society prey to "irrational" religion. Where Christianity fuses reason and faith, Islam, traditionally conceived, speaks of a God who is "absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality."[73] Secular liberalism forces religion into the private realm yet, paradoxically, becomes incapable of countering the very public challenge of religious violence that an absolutely transcendent God presents. If there is

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[69] Ratzinger, Joseph. *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 78

[70] Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University*, p. 4 See also the 2005 lecture, "Europe's Crisis of Culture" where he outlines similar arguments for the *logos* of the Christian faith, its rationality, in the face of a "Godless Society" and a "Culture of Rights" that would herald the disappearance of human dignity, "Europe's Crisis of Cultuere", in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings & Speeches*, edited by John F. Thornton & Susan B. Varenne (New York: Harper Collins, 2007): 325-335

[71] Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University*, p. 5

[72] Maher, Daniel P. "Pope Benedict XVI on Faith and Reason", *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Volume 7, No. 3 (2009): 625-52

[73] Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University*, p. 2

no mediation but the imperative of divine law, rationality has no place and plural conceptions of the good become impossible.[74]

This argument is reminiscent of the essays in the collection *Faith and Power* by Lesslie Newbigin, Lamin Sanneh and Jenny Taylor from a more evangelical tradition.[75] For these authors, there is a similar desire to recover the good of Christian mission and to identify the dangers of political Islam in a "naked" public square. The Anglican former Bishop of Rochester Michael Nazir-Ali, similarly, has written of the need to "reverse the amnesia" of a forgetful British culture. For Nazir-Ali, only a return to the Christian roots of society provides the spiritual and moral resources to combat ideological battles against political Islam.[76]

Michael Kirwan has suggested, drawing from Jürgen Moltmann, that there are two broad trajectories in Christian political theology, typified for him by the concepts of Covenant and Leviathan that helpfully position Pope Benedict's ideas. Covenant political theology assumes a positive role for social relations that create legal bonds out of an initial universal bond, or covenant, in God. Leviathan, illustrated supremely by the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes and exemplified by Pope Benedict, assumes a negative role for humanity such that the state is needed to control, through power, the chaos and evil that may otherwise ensue.[77] There are echoes here of the idealism of Carl Schmitt, the notorious 1930s political theorist who, similarly, brought a critique against the proceduralism of secular modernity which had evacuated national loyalty of any moral force, and emptied the political of all human

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[74] A parallel argument has been presented by the former *Financial Times* journalist Christopher Caldwell in his defence of a "rational Islamophobia" that would protect Europe's Christian heritage from the erosion of illiberal Muslims and a naïve and self-deceiving European political class: Caldwell, Christopher. *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2009). See Laitin, David. "Rational Islamophobia in Europe", *European Journal of Sociology*, Volume 51, No. 3 (2010): 429-447, for a sociological critique of "rational Islamophobia"

[75] Newbigin, Lesslie., Sanneh, Lamin., Taylor, Jenny. *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in 'Secular' Britain* (London: SPCK, 1998)

[76] Nazir-Ali, Michael. "Britain Today: How we came to be here and what we can do about it", *Anvil*, Volume 26, No. 2 (2009): 107-122

[77] Kirwan, Michael. *Political Theology: A New Introduction* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008) pp. 16-33

meaning.[78] Interestingly, in a forward to a recent edition of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, Tracy Strong observes the potential for Schmitt's treatise to be applied to contemporary debates about political Islam.[79] Where Pope Benedict and Michael Nazir-Ali see a public square which may claim to be neutral but in reality isn't, there is a consequent need to assert the good and delineate the boundaries of what is acceptable citizenship in a manner reminiscent of the *Freund/Feind* distinction evoked by Schmitt. Where the *Feind*, the enemy, is identified, there is a consequent shoring up of national solidarity and cohesiveness. From John Wyclif[80], through to Martin Luther[81], and William Muir[82] in Victorian times, there has been no shortage of portrayals of Islam as the "enemy" in an effort to reclaim and reconstitute the Christian foundation of national or continental identities.

For Michael Kirwan, these ideologies amount to political "mythology" because the myth of social solidarity claims "political legitimacy for itself": a "useful lie" to retain a sense of corporate self.[83] By contrast, a truly Christian political theology, in Augustinian terms, always works to *de-sacralise* secular power. However, the distinction between Covenant and Leviathan, between the pluralist and the idealist, may not be so stark. Claude Geffré offers an "exercise of remembrance" in a 2009 *Concilium* essay that challenges reductionist European Union accounts of the Christian heritage. He suggests that "the dignity of the human person,

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[78] See Carl Schmitt's classic work, *The Concept of the Political*, Expanded Edn., (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago, 2007)

[79] Strong, Tracy B. Forward to *The Concept of the Political*, p. xxxi. Arguably, Strong did not need to speculate when one reads Schmitt's remark that "Never in the thousand-year struggle between Christians and Moslems did it occur to a Christian to surrender rather than defend Europe out of love toward the Saracens or Turks. The enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally, and in the private sphere only does it make sense to love one's enemy, ie, one's adversary." The clear implication here is that Europe's "enemy" is Islam, Europe being "Christian", and that recognising this fact in cultural and political terms does not contradict the commandment to love the individual Muslim, Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*, p. 29

[80] Speaking of Islam, Wyclif, in his *De Fide Catholica*, wrote, "I am bold to say that this antireligion will grow until the clergy return to the poverty of Jesus Christ, and to its original state" quoted in Gaudeul, J.M. *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History II, Texts,* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studie Arabie d'Islamistica, 2000), p. 156

[81] Grislis, Egil. "Luther and the Turks," *Muslim World* 64 (1974): 180-193

[82] A Victorian civil servant in India who wrote a bestselling *Life of Mohamet* (1858-61): "the sword of Mahomet, and the Coran are the most fatal enemies of Civilization, Liberty and the Truth which the world has yet known" quoted in Ansari, H. *"The Infidel Within": Muslims in Britain since 1800*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), p. 61

[83] Kirwan, Michael. *Political Theology*, pp. 20-3

democracy, freedom, equality, security, justice and peace, are often secularized Christian values".[84] Yet this vision of a European Christian heritage can be opened up to include the "monotheistic humanism" in Judaism and Islam, reaching beyond "our post-colonial bad conscience".[85]

However, there has to be a serious question raised as to whether so-called "Christian values" can be so readily equated with secular democracies. It is one thing to free ourselves from the paralysis of a colonial guilt-trip and to affirm and protect freedoms in society; it is another to "bless" the *status quo* of a particular culture. It is true that the pope's Augustinianism, as Tracey Rowland observes, means that "the first service that Christian Revelation delivered to the political order was to liberate it from the burden of being the highest good for humanity."[86] However, "Christian Culture" itself, in this reading, is in danger of being sacralised and becoming a third "city" that conflates elements of the Church and the inherited political system. How does one deal with the legacy of Nazism's growth or the oppression of indigenous cultures from the colonialism of European Christian Culture?

A truly Augustinian appreciation of the penultimacy of secular power demands that any cultural legacy is sifted and critiqued. This need not lead to the historicism that Benedict rightly attributes to modernity, yet the logic of advocating "Christian Culture" can easily produce a conservatism that seems to embody self-preservation more than the common good. Aidan Nichols, for example, proposes the "sacralisation of Christian civilisation"[87], in *Christendom Awake*, and identifies elements of a necessarily re-energised Church, building on Joseph Ratzinger's project. These include a "functional inequality" that asserts male

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[84] Geffré, Claude. "Which Religious Heritages for the Future?", *Concilium* 2009/2: 24-38, p. 30

[85] Geffré, Claude. "Which Religious Heritages for the Future?", p. 35

[86] Rowland, Tracey. *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 116

[87] Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake: On Re-energising the Church in Culture*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1999), p. 82

priesthood,[88] reconceived ecumenism around the Petrine office and a high doctrine of the

Eucharistic sacrifice,[89] and reclaimed liturgical traditionalism that embodies the "time-

transcending" character of worship.[90] It is difficult to see how such a *particular* vision of the

Church can command "civilly recognised spiritual authority"[91] over other Christian

denominations let alone over a plural society of all faiths and none.

In parallel to Pope Benedict, John Milbank provides, from an Anglican standpoint, a

sympathetic account of the Christendom vision with his self-confessed "post-modern critical

Augustinianism".[92] Milbank seeks a recovery of a political theology grounded in the graced

identity of the church in its relations with the world, and thus not defined by *a priori* notions

of democracy or rights. It is *only* Christianity, through its "traditioned character of reason"[93]

that can attain the sort of political legitimacy that provides public space for other religions,

albeit in a qualified fashion. According to Milbank, the supersessionism of Islam and its

absolutist conception of *tawhid* militate against the absorption of cultural influences and

underscore a violent totalising of the other.[94] Milbank sees the European project as an

essentially "catholic" project of graced reason that recognises universal humanity in a way

that is alien to Islam and politically distinct. Again, the root theology of the respective

understanding of divinity is crucial here:

> "Allah is impersonal; for the most orthodox Islamic theology he enjoys no beatitude
>
> (unlike the Christian God), much less suffers pain. And he certainly does not express

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[88] Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*, pp. 117-129
[89] Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*, pp. 175-201
[90] Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*, pp. 21-39
[91] Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*, p. 82
[92] See Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd Edn., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 225-37
[93] Milbank, John. "Multiculturalism in Britain and the Political Identity of Europe", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Volume 9, No. 4 (November 2009): 268-281, p. 277
[94] Milbank, John. "Multiculturalism in Britain and the Political Identity of Europe",p. 278

himself internally in an image like the Christian *Logos*. Hence rule here on earth cannot reflect Allah."[95]

While recognising the diversity within Islam on the one hand, a genuinely plural basis for political action is disqualified by Milbank on the other. Despite Milbank's sweeping rhetorical flourishes, there remains the valid and persistent challenge to Islam of offering a rational account of itself, though we may wonder whether he takes seriously the constructive, inclusive accounts of Islam noted earlier. As with Cragg's analysis, an unbridled transcendence undermines anything that might be truly indicative of *polis*. God must delegate power for human power to be meaningful. Milbank, with Pope Benedict, is keen to legitimize a public square that generates religious discourse without the splintering of faith from reason that religious voluntarism produces. In this political theology there is an underlying metaphysics that affirms the mediated nature of religious experience and, with Cragg, recognises the sacramental in human nature.

The challenge would seem to be to defend the legacy of Christian freedom in Europe in a way that does justice to the plurality of faiths and diversity within Islam in particular such that an authentic inclusivity and universalism is realised in the political sphere. Where Kenneth Cragg would depart from Pope Benedict, and John Milbank, would be over their ready equation of European culture with the Christian faith. Cragg's warnings about self-assertion as antithetical to the religious sensibility would counter any suggestion that the Church is seeking to build a hedge around encroaching threats to political life. For Cragg, "It is only in being defenceless that faith is truly commended."[96] What may be described by Pope Benedict and John Milbank as a "Christian Culture" also birthed two world wars and the Nazi Holocaust and is arguably deserving of the critical distance that Cragg affords it. However,

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[95] Milbank, John. "Geopolitical Theology: Economy, Religion and Empire After 9/11", downloaded from http://www.scribd.com/doc/19773671/John-Milbank-Geopolitical-Economy-Religion-and-Empire-after-911n p. 84 on 12th September 2011

[96] Brown, Christopher. "Kenneth Cragg on Shi'a Islam and Iran", p.387

both Benedict and Milbank highlight the significance of reasoned faith and its challenge to Islamic voluntarism in grounding a political theology of unity in diversity.

Rowan Williams: *Sharia* Law and Interactive Pluralism[97]

Archbishop Rowan Williams' *sharia* law speech of 2008 sits at the intersection of the debate around the role of a church established by law and the recognition of the distinct nature of Islam in public life.[98] Interestingly, Williams' own Augustinianism leads him to depart from Benedict and Milbank in advocating for a plural public square as a form of Christian liberalism.[99] Where Benedict inflamed many Muslims by suggesting that Islam needed to reckon with its violence to be properly integrated in a continent infused with the rationalism of Christianity, Williams suggests that English law needed to give proper recognition to other religious communities, citing the case of *sharia* law. Williams' argument was not new, and has precedent in the accommodation of aspects of Orthodox Jewish law, but mention of *sharia* evoked images of *sharia* as violence and repression.

An important essay indicating Williams' long-standing views on legal plurality is "Liberation Theology and the Anglican Tradition" from 1984.[100] Drawing from the works of the Anglican divine John Neville Figgis (1866-1919), Williams advocates the primacy of the voluntary corporation; for Figgis this was an argument for the personality of the trade union. The state,

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[97] See Chapman, Mark D. "Rowan Williams' Political Theology: Multiculturalism and Interactive Pluralism", *Journal of Anglican Studies*, Volume 9, No. 1 (2011): 61-79 for a summary account of Rowan Williams' "interactive pluralism" and indebtedness to Neville Figgis

[98] Williams, R. "Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective", Thursday 7th February 2008, downloaded from http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1575 19th February 2011

[99] Tracey Rowland compares the Augustinianism of Milbank's "Radical Orthodoxy" school with Pope Benedict's political theology, noting the influence of Rowan Williams on the former. Rowland, Tracey. *Ratzinger's Faith*, p. 28. As Rowland points out, though, the converging political theologies of Milbank and Pope Benedict produce very different anthropologies and ecclesiologies. The adjective, "Augustinian" is elsewhere helpfully described by Rowland as a "theology of grace associated with the Nouvelle Théologie scholars" and an interest in "the relationship between the secular and sacral orders, the role of memory in the formation of the soul and the importance of a narrative tradition for intellectual and spiritual development." Rowland, Tracey. *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II*, (London/NY: Routledge, 2003), p. 6. Uniting the Augustinianism of Archbishop Rowan Williams, John Milbank and Pope Benedict is, I would argue, an "ecclesial-turn" that asserts that the Church "should not be policed or determined by some external discourse", Bretherton, Luke. "Introduction: Oliver O'Donovan's Political Theology and the Liberal Imperative", *Political Theology*, Volume 9, Issue 3 (2008): 265-271, p. 269

[100] Williams, R. "Liberation Theology and the Anglican Tradition", in *Politics and Theological Identity*, Rowan Williams & David Nicholls, (London: The Jubilee Group, 1984): 7-26

then, has a relegated sovereignty and is thus merely an "association of associations". This assures the "eschatological reserve" of the Augustinian doctrine of the two[101] and gives space for the respective integrities of religious communities. In this economy, the liberalism of a genuine plurality stems from a corresponding ecclesiology of conciliarity; of unity in diversity:

> "This relative independence-never absolute independence-of parish, of diocese of province, of local union, this organic and federalist conception of the whole, is at one with the facts of life in society of all kinds. We must remember that society does not cease to be society because it called itself the Church."[102]

Even from the vantage point of early twentieth century Britain, Figgis had a clear-sighted view that "English Society is ceasing to be Christian"[103] and that "Our hopes will only be realised when we give up, as I have heard it put, 'playing at being a majority.'"[104] In Rupert Shortt's biography of Williams, a former colleague talks of previous archbishops wanting to "give a moral and spiritual lead to the nation as a whole on particular issues"; "[Archbishop George] Carey shared that belief, but could not make it a reality. I question whether Rowan even wants to try."[105] Williams displays a diffidence about the will-to-power and a rejection

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[101] By contrast, Aidan Nichols' Augustinianism leads him to conclude that "Only if the State is also a sacred guardian of beliefs and values that are precious could" the state expect anyone to die for it, Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*, p. 78. Williams might well respond with William Cavanaugh that the nation-state has *no* claim on its citizens to die for it. For Cavanaugh, the church is the is one, true "public square", as the embodiment of the universal, not the state: "When the church is viewed as particular—as one of many in civil society—and the nation-state is viewed as universal—as the larger unifying reality—then it is inevitable that the one will absorb the many, in the putative interests of harmony and peace. Indeed, war becomes a means of furthering the integration of the many into the one; we must all stand together when faced with an enemy", Cavanaugh, William T. "From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space", *Political Theology*, Volume 7, Issue 3 (2006): 299-321, p. 320 and Cavanaugh, William T. "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good", *Modern Theology*, Volume 20, Issue 2 (April 2004): 243–74. What seems to separate the Augustinianism of Williams and Cavanaugh from that of Milbank, Benedict and Nichols is a greater attention to the sinfulness of the created order
[102] Figgis, John Neville. *Hopes for English Religion*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), p. 80
[103] Figgis, John Neville. *Religion and English Society: Two Addresses Delivered at a Conference Held in London November 9th and 10th, 1910*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), p. v
[104] Figgis, John Neville. *Religion and English* Society, p. vii, See also Figgis, John Neville. *Churches in the Modern State*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913)
[105] Shortt, Rupert. *Rowan's Rule: The Biography of the Archbishop*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), p. 315

of the idea that the Church should seek *any* privileged position of law in society. However, a static view of Williams' political theology would betray the development of his own ideals and certainly the inevitable ownership of a tradition of establishment now he is archbishop. Indeed, a succession of speeches and publications[106] give the lie to the view that Williams does not want to "give a moral and spiritual lead to the nation". The *sharia* speech itself was notably about the legal system and *on behalf of* Muslims and by no means assumed a marginal role for the Church of England. A nuanced reading of Williams' interactive pluralism as it stands today would suggest that spiritual leadership is offered but not presumed, and that that leadership strives to find the common good with other communities of difference.

There is no appeal to a purported universal realm of the secular in Williams' ideas, such as Cragg invokes, rather an organic pluralism that realises public religion in the dynamic interaction over shared goods. Thus, the distinctive nature of those religions is guarded and difference recognised and embraced within the unity of those shared goods. Thus, Figgis can say, whilst affirming public space for all "associations", that "The accent ought to be not on the likeness, but on the difference of Christianity from its rivals, whether philosophic or ethical or religious."[107] Likewise, Williams states that "I don't believe that religious dialogue is ever advanced by denying difference."[108] Williams' political theology protects the integrities of Islam whilst, in the agonistic interaction over shared goods, it allows for the exploration of the limits of, say *sharia* law, as they affect the most vulnerable, and recognises

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[106] The following publications and speeches are typical examples of Williams' concern that a Christian voice is articulated in British public life: *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on 11th September and its Aftermath* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), after 9/11, Article in *Newsweek Magazine*, 1st February 2010, edited from a speech entitled "Building an Ethical Economy: Theology and the Marketplace", http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2740, and "Religious Faith and Human Rights", Lecture delivered to the London School of Economics, 1st May 2008, http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2087 downloaded 1st March 2011

[107] Figgis, John Neville. *The Gospel and Human Need: Being the Hulsean Lectures Delivered before the University of Cambridge, 1908-9,* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), p. viii

[108] Williams, Rowan. *Islam, Christianity and Pluralism: The Zaki Badawi Memorial Lecture I* (London: AMSS UK, 2007), p. 2

the diversity of cultures and religions. It is across the dynamic of the primary units of religious communities, and not via a state apparatus that assumes a religious role, that the due limits of religious laws are realised.

The question for this model of interactive pluralism, then, seems to be, what is to be done where those shared goods are not apparent or there is an insuperable conflict between communities about the ultimate ends of law? The shortcomings of Figgis' ideas among the pluralists of the 1930's identified by Matthew Grimley seem relevant to Williams' contemporary account:

> "A society in which the main unit was the interest group would be prone to selfishness and conflict. In its way Figgis' pluralism was as dangerous as individualism, because like individualism it presented a fragmented and self-interested picture of social relations."[109]

A traditional criticism of the omnicompetent state was that it portrayed the individual in competition with the state, and thus in necessarily self-seeking mode: 'Man versus the State' (*sic*). Figgis was countering this tendency by advocating for the strength of voluntary associations, recognised by the state. According to Grimley, Figgis may well have fallen into the trap of another relationship of self-aggrandisement: 'Groups versus the State'.[110] Has Williams merely replaced the old 'Man versus the State' distinction with 'Islam versus the State'? Thus, the public square becomes an arena for the competing self-interest of religious groups such as the Church, Islam, and so on, with the inevitable problems of identifying which groups or leaders are appropriately representative of these constituencies. In this economy, the common good is in danger of taking second place to the selfish aspirations of religious communities. The ability of these respective groups to wield power and influence

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[109] Grimley, Matthew. *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 77
[110] Grimley, Matthew. *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, p. 77

within a mode of competitive self-interest renders the public square more akin to a marketplace.

Milbank warms to Williams' defence of corporatist religious identities but sees that defence as only built upon a single cultural foundation that is at least broadly Christian: "We can only accommodate Islam on our own terms…Something always rules, and this something is always substantive." To recognise coercive religious law within the English legal system, the demands made for *sharia* law by Islam's unique status as a "rival universality to that of Christianity" according to Milbank, would erode both Christianity and Enlightenment.[111] From a legal standpoint, the simple polarity suggested by Milbank disguises the pragmatic realities of constitutional pluralism, though. Russell Sandberg, in his seminal account of religious law, responds to critics of Williams that argued for the monist cultural roots of the legal system. The actual legal situation presents a far more variegated picture than the rhetoric of a unitary, binding culture would suggest:

> "Religious law is already recognised in England and Wales in several different ways…the rules and structures of religious associations are binding on assenting members through the doctrine of 'consensual compact'. Moreover, religious laws and practices are free to operate where the law of the State is silent."[112]

As Sandberg states elsewhere, "the Archbishop's nuanced lecture deserves nuanced responses. And part of that nuance is the recognition of the complex ways in which Islam and the law already interact."[113] The pre-existing interaction of English and Welsh law with politico-religious Islam offers a genuine challenge to the thesis of cultural monism that Milbank and Benedict would defend.

[111] Milbank, John. "Shari'a and the True Basis of Group Rights: Islam, the West, and Liberalism." In, Shari'a in the West, eds. Rex Ahdar & Nicholas Aroney, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 135-157, p. 146
[112] Sandberg, Russell. *Law and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 182
[113] Sandberg, Russell. "Islam and English Law", *Law and Justice*, No. 164, (Hilary/Easter, 2010): 27-44, p. 43

The original debate around the *sharia* law speech occurred within the context of the New Labour appeal to "community cohesion". Mark Chapman's warm endorsement of Williams' interactive pluralism concludes with a summary affirmation of the primacy of the association: "The panacea for the problems of community cohesion lies in trusting the people".[114] This would seem to suggest a degree of complacency unwarranted by either Williams' speech or Figgis' writings. In view of his comment that "Without God, human society becomes barren and decays"[115] one wonders what Figgis would make of challenges to the Church today. He is most certainly alive to the dangers of a society or nation *without* any moral compass.[116] Williams, too, recognises that:

> "There has therefore to be some concept of common good that is not prescribed solely in terms of revealed Law, however provisional or imperfect such a situation is thought to be. And this implies in turn that the Muslim, even in a predominantly Muslim state, has something of a dual identity, as citizen and as believer within the community of the faithful."[117]

For Williams, though, there is a conscious avoidance of a description of what that common good *is* that might bind Christian and Muslim communities into a cohesive society.[118] Instead, the primary objective seems to be to ensure that religious language is acceptable in the public sphere, thereby challenging "stateism" and the "persistent and at the moment rather over anxious, social concern with preserving a kind of 'neutrality' in the public sphere."[119] Thus, like Cragg and Benedict, there is a third party present in each of their Christian responses to political Islam: secular modernity and its tendency to privatise religion.

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[114] Chapman, Mark D. *Religion and Public Policy in Brown's Britain* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008), p.122

[115] Figgis, John Neville. *Hopes for English Religion*, p. 132

[116] "The higher goods even of human culture will not persist apart from a spiritual ideal", Figgis, John Neville. *Hopes for English Religion*, p. 132

[117] Williams, R. "Civil and Religious Law in England: A Religious Perspective"

[118] For John Milbank, it is a "teleological ethics" that is missing from Rowan Williams' account: what is the group *goal* for the whole society? In Milbank's account, though, only the catholic spirit can found an inclusive common good. Milbank, John. "Multiculturalism in Britain and the Political Identity of Europe",p. 275

[119] Williams, Rowan. *Islam, Christianity and Pluralism*, p. 12

Engaging with the Political Theology of Oliver O'Donovan

Another possible conversation partner across the political theologies of Kenneth Cragg, Pope Benedict, John Milbank and Archbishop Rowan Williams is Oliver O'Donovan. In *The Desire of the Nations* and *The Ways of Judgment* O'Donovan presents what is, together, a major treatise of biblical exegesis recovering a classical political theology.[120] Situating himself within a self-conscious Augustinian inheritance, O'Donovan views the political theology of the Church from the vantage point of the mission of God. In common with Benedict and Milbank, O'Donovan would bring attention to the fact that "The self-consciousness of the would-be secular society lies in its determination to conceal the religious judgments that it has made."[121] O'Donovan's more Protestant Augustinianism, though, conscious of the sinfulness of temporal governance, would emphasise that the Christian political order is not "a project of the church's mission", "The church's one project is to witness to the Kingdom of God" and "Christendom is a *response* to mission".[122] Thus, understandings of power and government are to be seen as arenas for proclaiming the lordship of Christ in recognition that "Christendom is an *era*", not an objective.[123]

The biblical narrative of the fourfold Christ-event of incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension then characterises a necessarily christo-centric political theology. The key Christ-event that O'Donovan notes as absent from much political theology is the ascension. Modern accounts of the Church's relation to the world give insufficient account of the realised eschatology of the powers bowing the knee to Christ the King. Thus, "Christendom" has become a symbol of the co-option of the Church rather than an episode of victory in mission

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[120] O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) which could be said to be his core treatise; *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans, 2005) is then a corresponding account of the theological nature of government authority. See Bretherton, Luke. "Oliver O'Donovan's Political Theology and the Liberal Imperative", *Political Theology*, Volume 9, No. 3 (2008): 265-271 for an excellent overview of O'Donovan's project
[121] O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations* p. 247
[122] O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations* p. 195
[123] O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations* p. 195, "an era in which the truth of Christianity was taken to be a truth of secular politics"

and, at the very least, an affirmation of the *logical possibility* of the secular deferring to the witness of the gospel.

Where O'Donovan's political theology departs from the advocacy of Christian Culture in Benedict and Milbank is in the reformed tradition of the "godly prince" that qualifies the authority of the Church, recognising the fallen-ness not just of the temporal political order but of the Church in the world. For O'Donovan, the Church is not a wholly autonomous, perfect society compartmentalised from temporal, secular governance.[124] O'Donovan, for example, judges the medieval papal tradition as "Christianizing political authority by assimilating it to God's work of salvation", a twofold process that involved the subordination of civil to ecclesiastical government and the juridicalizing of church authority.[125] The assertion of Christian Culture by Benedict would seem to follow this same tendency that "blurred the distinction between God's providential and salvific action".[126] For O'Donovan, there is a more minimalist role of government such that "The service rendered by the state to the church is to facilitate its mission. The state itself cannot pursue the mission of the church, for it is not consecrated to that task and its weapons of coercion are not fitted for it."[127] Benedict and the Radical Orthodoxy school, typified by Milbank, would seek to identify the *logos* of any culture;[128] the Trinitarian logic providing the Church's standard for any civilisation.[129] The analogising of temporal rule with the *logos* was typical of "Hellenistic Christendom" and

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[124] See O'Donovan's account of the reformed tradition of political theology as embodied in the origins of the Church of England in O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1986), p. 100

[125] O'Donovan, Oliver. & Lockwood-O'Donovan, Joan. "Introduction", *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, edited by Oliver O'Donovan & Joan Lockwood-O'Donovan, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), p. 5

[126] O'Donovan, Oliver. & Lockwood-O'Donovan, Joan. "Introduction", *Bonds of Imperfection*, p. 6

[127] O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of the Nations* p. 217

[128] Rowland, Tracey. *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II*, Chapter 5: "The *logos* of the *Kultur* of modernity". On Benedict, specifically, "Ratzinger's interventions in the area of political theory have taken the form of exhorting liberal elites to recognize that the rule of law must itself be based on solid foundations…the *logos* inherent in creation." Rowland, Tracey. *Ratzinger's Faith*, p. 122

[129] Rowland, Tracey. *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II*, p. 21

is judged by O'Donovan a dangerous over-inflation of the Church's authority.[130] Though

otherwise in agreement over his critique of the autonomous individualism of secular

modernity, Nichols notices O'Donovan's reformed political theology and what is arguably

the key ground for distinguishing him from Benedict:

> "So a Catholic cannot concur in O'Donovan's view that 'the identity of the Church is
>
> given wholly and completely in the relation of its members to the ascended Christ
>
> independently of Church ministry and organisation'."[131]

That the Church is relativized by the ascended Christ enables the Church to receive the

challenge of the godly prince and, in turn, qualifies the temporal order which can never attain

wholesale sacralisation by the Church as "Christian Culture".

Where Benedict offers an *ecclesio*-centric political theology, in contrast to O'Donovan's

christo-centric vision, Milbank similarly seems to prioritise ecclesiology over christology.

For Bryan Hollon, this "forgets that the church itself remains always in need of

forgiveness."[132]Milbank differs from Benedict by basing the primacy of ecclesiology over

christology on the "re-narration", or "re-realization" of God by the Church.[133] By doing this,

Milbank absorbs Jesus' human identity into his divine identity, undermining the doctrine of

the incarnation because Jesus' human identity is "evacuated", and unmooring his political

theology from the biblical narrative.[134] This is how Milbank can arrive at a very different

ecclesiology and anthropology from Benedict, while effectively arguing for a Christian

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[130] O'Donovan, Oliver. "Government as Justice", *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, edited by Oliver O'Donovan & Joan Lockwood-O'Donovan, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), p. 211

[131] Nichols, Aidan. *Christendom Awake*, p. 77

[132] Hollon, Bryan C. *Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2010), pp. 178-81

[133] See Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) & *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)

[134] Hollon, Bryan C. *Everything is Sacred*, pp. 131-47. It must be noted that this critique of Milbank does not necessitate the reformed sensibility of O'Donovan. Hollon believes that Henri de Lubac, to whom Milbank and Benedict are both indebted, grounds a political theology on the priority of Christology over ecclesiology. It is significant that de Lubac was reacting to the "political Augustinianism" of medieval Catholicism that O'Donovan also chooses to distance himself from, pp. 57-68

metaphysics of culture. I would argue, then, that the *pursuit* of Christian Culture, as exemplified by the contrasting projects of Benedict and Milbank both rest on an overloading of the Church with a task proper only to Christ. O'Donovan's political theology, though, provides for the acceptance by the state of the mission of the Church without requiring the Church to call on the state to fully integrate a Christian vision.

O'Donovan's approach would seem to offer a response to Islamic accusations of apolitical Christianity whilst allowing for the presence of Islam in a plural economy. There is no fusion of the two authorities, temporal and eternal, in O'Donovan's political theology; but neither are they discrete realms of activity. So there exists a defence of a secular endorsement of the Christian faith. But this defence can bear the agonism that is characteristic of Rowan Williams' interactive pluralism: the Church speaks about the totality of a redemptive future in Christ, but in a plural context where it will find divergences and resonances with communities of difference. In a telling review of Luke Bretherton's *Hospitality and Holiness*,[135] O'Donovan talks of a necessary vulnerability to the displacement of Christian witness from the heart of public life:

> "But for Christians, being institutionally vulnerable is not the point-and that is what makes all kinds of new enterprise possible. The point is that Christians can act in welcoming openness to others without suppressing their confession or denying their Lord."[136]

The *shape* of plural societies is not defined and will only become clear in the expansive exercise of Christian welcome[137] from a political theology serious about the claims of Christ

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[135] Bretherton, Luke. *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)

[136] O'Donovan, Oliver. Book Review: Bretherton, Luke. *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), *Political Theology*, Volume 10, No. 1 (2009): 187-189, p. 188

[137] O'Donovan, Oliver. "Judgment, Tradition and Reason: A Response", *Political Theology*, Volume 9, No. 3 (2008): 395-414, "If Christians enter this process of push and pull on any different terms from other people, it is simply that it is of ultimately less importance to them whether they do the pulling and the pushing or get pulled and pushed.", p. 412

on all authorities. Christian politics is not an arena for the implementation of an ideal of culture as it seems to be for Benedict or Milbank. But political theology *is* an exercise in the Church's demonstration and proclamation of Christ's lordship. Thus, O'Donovan offers the agonism of Williams accompanied with the signposting to Jesus as the proper goal of all human flourishing. Where Williams' *hints* at the grounds for the common good, O'Donovan makes explicit that the source of truly "public" life can be found in the life of the Church as it points to the ascended Christ.

What is especially intriguing for the discussion of Christian political theology are several tantalising references to "monotheism" by Oliver O'Donovan which might open the door to a specific sympathy with Islam. He refers to Augustine's reference to justice's requirement of a "serious monotheism".[138] In *The Ways of Judgment*, "monotheistic liberalism" is seen as the only alternative to the inevitable polytheism of "secular liberalism".[139] In personal correspondence O'Donovan has expanded on these limited allusions, stating that "Divine authority is a regulative principle in politics with a healthy effect in limiting, as well as authorising, the pretensions of power".[140] Monotheism "is only a framework within which further religious questions can be raised. But it is not nothing." There is a sense in which Islam *can* be a partner in vocalising the ultimate responsibilities of humanity, much as with Cragg's affirmation of *khilafa*. Anything other than monotheism devolves power to the state as arbiter of competing claims and creates its own idolatry and the empty judgment of proceduralism. Again, this echoes Williams' plea for public reasoning to avoid the vacuity

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[138] O'Donovan, Oliver. "Judgment, Tradition and Reason: A Response", p. 412
[139] O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Ways of Judgment*, p. 76. It is worth noting that O'Donovan's otherwise Barthian treatise gives a rather more positive potential to monotheism than did Barth. Monotheism by itself could be used in absolute terms and become its own idolatry. Nazism had absolutised the state and, interestingly, Hitler was regarded by Barth as "Allah's Prophet" for his day, an example of the dangers of untrammelled monotheism that was falsely objective and reductive of God's mystery: Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: Volume II/1, The Doctrine of God*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), pp. 448-9
[140] from personal correspondence between the author and Oliver O'Donovan dated 30th July 2009

and totalitarianism of politics as "successful assertion" [141] but, for O'Donovan, monotheism does not ground a political theology. What the concept of monotheism is doing, then, is exposing the potential idolatry of the state and prising open the possibility that the language of transcendence can enter the political realm. Monotheism, of itself, does not guarantee diversity and freedom for minorities (which seems to be Barth's contention[142]), but it does relativise the pretensions of the state and puts under the spotlight the supposed neutrality of secular liberalism.

Conclusion

As they have engaged with political Islam, what unites Kenneth Cragg, Pope Benedict, John Milbank and Archbishop Rowan Williams is a clear vision to unmask the idolatries of secular liberalism and to appeal to a transcendent horizon in politics. Kenneth Cragg works with the doctrines of dominion and *khilafa* to suggest a common liability of the properly "secular", responsible to God, constantly attentive to the dangers of the will-to-power and the self-deceptiveness of religion. Pope Benedict and John Milbank seek a recovery of the Christian roots of Europe as a hedge against the totalising and violent trajectories both of a supposedly neutral public square and a voluntarist Islam that refuses to find space for the other. Archbishop Rowan Williams sees in the primacy of social identities the potential for an interactive pluralism that allows faith communities to be fully themselves whilst shaping cohesive society in the exercise of shared goods.

All these approaches face the persistent rebuke from Islam that Christianity is insufficiently political and in turn address the ongoing need for Islam to reckon with minority status and

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[141] Williams, Rowan. "Introducing the Debate: Theology and the Political", in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, edited by Creston Davis, John Milbank & Slavoj Zizek, (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2005): 1-3

[142] Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*, p. 448: "A good example of the absolutising of 'uniqueness' is provided by the noisy fanaticism of Islam regarding the one God, alongside whom, it is humorous to observe, only the baroque figure of His prophet is entitled to a place of honour. 'Monotheism' is obviously the esoteric mystery behind nearly all the religions with which we are familiar, as well as most of the primitive religions. 'Monotheism' is an idea which can be directly divined or logically and mathematically constructed without God…For the cosmic forces in whose objectivity it is believed that the unique has been found are varied. It is only by an act of violence that one of them can be given pre-eminence over the others."

genuine plurality. As these theologies are expressed, the significance to political thought of the doctrine of God, the fallibility of humanity, and the nature of revelation are readily apparent. In today's globalised world, it is hard to see how a single value-based system of legal and political thought can have practical meaning. The interactive pluralism of Williams, then, seems to reflect realities as well as giving space for the integrities of each religious community and for the evident diversity within Islam. However, bringing in the contributions of Oliver O'Donovan might suggest the potential for a greater confidence in the evangelical basis for political theology that is particularly faithful to the Christian narrative. Indeed, it must be noted that the penultimacy that all the authors wish to ascribe to temporal politics is itself a confessional act that is not always explicitly owned.

It would seem, however, that each contribution provides a necessary corrective for the Church. Cragg reminds us to engage Islam from within its own texts and on its own terms. Benedict, with Milbank, highlights the significance of rational challenges to absolute transcendence and the violence that can otherwise ensue, proposing a Christian synthesis of faith and reason in public life. Williams underscores the importance of shared goods across religious communities. Each, in its own way, though, begs the question of how much of the Medinan political paradigm Islam itself can re-imagine in the context of contemporary religious diversity.