

Review: Kenneth Cragg: *Am I not your Lord? Human Meaning in Divine Question*, London, Melisende 2002

Manuela Giorgetti

Kenneth Cragg's book leads the reader through a fascinating exploration of Christianity and Islam, of their theologies and their histories.

Identities and affinities between the two faith are found, beyond the often deceiving common references (Abraham, Jesus, Mary) at the very core of their monotheistic creeds; but so are also their divergences, made all the more sharp and inimical for all the two faiths truly share.

Both faiths receive from their scriptures the perception of "a benign earth and a meaningful world entrusted by God to man in creaturely custody" and the apprehension of human life and civilization as God willed, divine enterprises.

Both faiths share the awareness of a Satanic power adversarial to the divine-human covenant and set down to test, deceive, lead astray man and ultimately prove his indignity. And both faiths look at revelation through the agencies of prophet hood as the source of that education and guidance. Human kind must receive to carry out the divine design against such a powerful opponent.

But while Islam perceives man as frail and weak in resisting evil, but inherently uncorrupted, Christianity has a deeper, tragic realism about human evil. As a result Islam and Christianity await and receive from God different help and deal differently with the issue of evil.

Islam receives in the Qur'an through Mohammed the Divine Word as law and rely on it for guidance and protection against the satanic schemes, while forging and firmly owning societal structures to mould and keep man into the divinely intended shape.

Christianity instead through Christ, the Incarnated Logos (Greek for "word"), is the recipient of God's love meeting and conquering evil, and renounces power over worldly matters (which are seen as bearing no resolution to the problem of human evil) to offer man redemption in Christ.

Can Christians and Muslims, on the ground of all they have in common, develop a dialogue through which their differences can be honoured, accepted and ultimately conciliated?

The author believes this is possible if the holy texts are read "with active open mind, not passively possessed"; if faith renounces dogmatism and, respecting other's loyalties as well as its own, engages in a dialogue based on self scrutiny and on trust in the boundless potential of man to know and find God in his own soul. That God in the womb of time "expectantly waits on human recognition", is disclosed in Sura 7.172, where God asks "to all human progeny in their long generations since the loins of Adam's sons: Am I not your Lord?".

This book is an immensely learned, articulate, often complex to follow, but deeply passionate contribution to the development of this dialogue, which the present historic circumstances make dramatically urgent, but also facilitate through the opportunities offered by what Kenneth Cragg calls "the contemporary factors of hope": the exilic Islam, the internationalization of Islam and Muslim feminism.

Though admittedly not an easy book for non- theologically minded people, this is certainly a book well worth reading; studying and reflecting upon that will greatly reward the reader who stays with it.

Bishop Kenneth Cragg is a major figure in Christian-Muslim conversations. He has spent some 45 years in the Middle East as Professor of Philosophy, as a chaplain, and as Assistant Bishop in the Anglican Archdiocese of Jerusalem. He has also taught at the University of Sussex in England. His published works include hundreds of scholarly articles and more than 30 books, including 'The Arab Christian and Palestine: The Prize and Price of Zion' and 'Am I not your Lord?' Bishop Cragg has lectured at Oxford University, in Europe and the U.S.