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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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HENDRIK KRAEMER AND THE MISSION TO ISLAM

by

Armand Garon, W.F.

A dissertation submitted to the  
Faculty of Theology of Saint Paul  
University in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
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## ABOUT THE WRITER

Armand Garon was born in 1923 in Quebec City, Canada. He obtained a B.A. degree from Laval University in Quebec in 1943. He completed his theological studies with the Society of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) in 1949 and was ordained the same year. He attended the courses of the Institute of Education at the University of London, England, in 1950 and was awarded the Postgraduate Teacher's Diploma. He studied journalism for some time and went to Malawi, then Nyasaland, Africa, in 1951. He worked as a journalist, editor and translator with the (Roman) Catholic missions from 1952 to 1960. In 1961 he took up pastoral work at a mission station until his second home leave in 1968. From 1965 to 1968 he had also been a member of the Advisory Committee of the Malawi Publications Bureau. He received the degree of Master of Theology from Laval University in 1969. He then joined the staff of the Institute of Mission Studies at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, where he was a lecturer from 1969 to 1977.

## ABBREVIATIONS, SPELLING AND KORANIC REFERENCES

### 1. Abridged Titles.

The titles of some of Dr Kraemer's books and articles, those in particular that were quoted with some frequency, often appear in an abridged form in this dissertation. Here is a list of the abbreviations that were used:

#### Books

De Islam als probleem: De Islam als godsdienstigen als zendingsprobleem.

The Christian Message: The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World.

From Missionfield: From Missionfield to Independent Church.

World Cultures: World Cultures and World Religions.

Een nieuw geluid: Een nieuw geluid op het gebied der Koranexegese.

#### Articles

"Eenige grepen": "Eenige grepen uit de moderne Apologie van den Islam".

"Mission im Wandel": "Mission im Wandel der Völkerwelt".

"Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten": stands for two essays, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch" and "Die Lage der islamischen Welt und die christliche Kirche", which form a whole in the same publication.

"L'Islam, une religion": "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme".

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"Islamic Culture": "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy".

"The Role and Responsibility": "The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission".

Finally Dr Van Leeuwen's biography of Dr Kraemer: Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk has been referred to as Hendrik Kraemer.

### 2. Spelling.

The spelling of Arabic words or names follows that used by L. Gardet in L'Islam, religion et communauté, Foi vivante, 127, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1970, p. 455-490. We have kept Gardet's spelling in our own text and when translating Dr Kraemer's writings, but we have respected Dr Kraemer's own usage in all original quotations, either in English or in other languages. However, we have retained the English words 'Koran' and 'koranic' throughout this work.

As regards quotations from Agama Islam, it must be noted that in Dr Kraemer's time the sounds of Malay as spoken in the Dutch East Indies were rendered in accordance with the Dutch phonetic system. Modern Indonesian has adopted a different spelling.

### 3. Koranic References.

The few verses quoted from the Koran in this dissertation are referred to according to the numeration

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followed by R. Bell in his The Qur'ān, translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1960 (1937), Vol. 1, xii, 1-343 p. and Vol. 2, vii, 345-697 p.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1938 Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965) appeared on the missionary scene as the foremost exponent of a Reformed theology of mission with the publication of The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World<sup>1</sup>. This book had been written at the request of the International Missionary Council to provide background material for the World Missionary Conference which took place at Tambaram (Madras) in India the same year.

Directly after it came out Dr Kraemer's work became the subject of strong debate inside Anglican and Protestant missionary circles. Some saw in it a welcome and refreshing return to the biblical foundations of evangelism. Others, however, took issue with its radical rejection of non-Christian religions and what they considered was a too narrow understanding of revelation.

Although Dr Kraemer's ideas have been discussed at length by a number of people interested in the theology of mission, to our knowledge there exists no systematic treatment of his particular approach to the Muslim world as a missionary problem. Yet Dr Kraemer was not only concerned with Islam in a theoretical way, but he worked in the Dutch East

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p. This work went through its seventh printing in 1969.

Indies (Indonesia) for the growth of the Church in Muslim surroundings and to the end remained absorbed in the search for suitable ways of presenting Jesus Christ to the followers of the Prophet.

In view of increasing interreligious contacts between Christians and Muslims and bearing in mind the widespread and generally accepted opinion that the Muslim world is on the whole impervious to the Gospel, a study of Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam would not only fill a gap in our knowledge of that outstanding missionary but would also be of service to all those who are concerned to open the House of Islam<sup>2</sup> for Jesus Christ.

It is the purpose of this research to put together as clear an exposition as possible of Dr Kraemer's views on evangelism as directed towards the Muslim people. This is already conveyed by the title Dr Kraemer and the Mission to Islam given to this dissertation. The arrangement of such insights and notions of Dr Kraemer's as are needed to reach our goal hinges on the two subjects expressed by the title: that of mission and that of Islam. These two subjects suggest a number of themes which mark out the boundaries of our field

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<sup>2</sup> The words "House of Islam", much used by Dr Kraemer, translate the Arabic phrase "dār al-Islām" which applies to the world of Islam as opposed to the world of the non-believers. The latter is called "dār al-ḥarb", i.e. "the house of war".

of research. Accordingly Dr Kraemer's thought can be studied along the following lines: the non-Christian religions, revelation, the Church, the mission and the building of Christian communities. All these themes are related to the Christian mission. Concerning the second subject, that of Islam, the following themes offer themselves: Islam as a religion and as a community, the present state of Islam, the theological relation between Islam and Christianity, the special problems of the Christian mission to Islam and the manner of the mission to Islam.

Although the thematic material presented above seems to be required by the purpose of this dissertation, it may be objected that a survey of Dr Kraemer's ideas on the mission in general is not called for within the context of our study. Admittedly his ideas on the Christian mission were explored by various authors nor is it intended to duplicate what others have already investigated. Nonetheless, how Dr Kraemer envisaged the mission to Islam depends basically on his views about the mission as a whole. Moreover, the subject of mission, which is one of the two poles of this research, implies a consideration, however cursory, of various components of his missionary teaching, particularly his standpoint on non-Christian religions in general, his idea of revelation and his understanding of the missionary mandate of the Church. Perhaps, too, it would be rash of this writer to take for

## INTRODUCTION

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granted that Dr Kraemer's general theory of mission was as widely known as it deserved to be. For these reasons a survey was made of the main elements of that theory.

The comprehensive information thus secured did help us lay the essential foundations for a better understanding of Dr Kraemer's specific views on Islam as a field of missionary activity and endeavour. A kind of theological evaluation of Islam according to Dr Kraemer was then worked out on the basis of that writer's analysis of notions common to the Christian faith and to Islam, such as God, revelation and man. Moreover, since missionary work is no abstract endeavour but a practical one grounded in the historical conditions of a given people, the ideas of our writer on contemporary Islam have also been presented, mainly from the angle of the impact of secularized modernity on the Muslim world. Finally, before coming to a study of the ways of the mission to Islam, we have gathered together his comments on the question of Islam's notable resistance to the Gospel.

In this way we have tried to answer a question which it would have been dishonest to ignore when dealing with Dr Kraemer's idea of the mission to the Muslims. Dr Kraemer wrote a lot on Islam and all its aspects. He studied it as a religion, a culture and a political community. He followed its long and checkered religious development with its schisms, its sects and, within the pale of orthodoxy, its various

theological schools. He looked into its history as Islam went from its mediaeval splendour to the humiliation of colonial domination before it finally regained its freedom and showed new signs of resurgence. Dr Kraemer in his writings on Islam overlooked none of those aspects. The question that arose was what elements to retain from all that literature in order to give a fair idea of Dr Kraemer's general understanding of Islam, without losing sight of our chief concern which was his views on the mission to Islam. We trust that the question has been met in a satisfactory manner by setting forth his ideas on some theological themes common to Christianity and Islam, on the resistance of the Muslim world to the Gospel and on the problems the House of Islam must contend with in modern times.

The thought of Dr Kraemer on the mission to Islam itself shows significant changes in his writings and it was deemed advisable to treat it under two separate headings. We propose first to describe his approach to Islam within the traditional framework of the missions during the colonial period. In another section we present what we have called Dr Kraemer's second thoughts on the mission to Islam.

We end these observations on the contents of this study with what should have come first. One might take it for granted that Dr Kraemer knew Islam well. However, when it comes to reviewing his ideas on the mission to Islam, this

cannot be posited as an axiom. Therefore, Dr Kraemer's expert knowledge of Islam was surveyed at some length in the early pages of this dissertation, although not in terms of a discussion of his personal views on controverted questions. Rather we insisted on his studies, his travels and his publications. This had to be set within the course of his life and took into account the many aspects of his career. There is then in the first section on "Hendrik Kraemer and the House of Islam" a small amount of biographical material which it was not possible to leave out.

It will be expected at this point that we say something on the question of method. In conjunction with method various queries arise which concern both the nature of our source material and its use, and furthermore the spirit or inspiration in which this investigation was conducted. Hence the following observations.

As regards the information needed for this study, it is proposed to scrutinize as wide a selection as possible of Dr Kraemer's writings on the mission in general and on Islam in particular according to their date of publication, or of writing as the case may be, so as to come by a clear understanding of his views on the mission to Islam and of their development. We said: or of writing as the case may be. Actually some reports of Dr Kraemer's, written during his stay in Indonesia (1921-1927; 1930-1935) and holding important

material for our study, appeared only in 1958 in a book called From Missionfield to Independent Church. In this case what matters of course is the date of writing or composing, not that of publication. We tried to use as much material as possible that had a bearing on our subject. Dr Kraemer's Agama Islam (The Religion of Islam), an early two-volume work not readily accessible since it is written in Malay, was also included in this survey. Likewise, full use was made of the unfinished typescript of Islam in a Christian Perspective, on which Dr Kraemer was working before his death in 1965. As already explained, the scope of our subject made it impossible to confine our references only to articles or books dealing with Islam. For his general theory of mission a number of other writings from Dr Kraemer's pen had to be considered as well. To sum up, one may say that nearly all of our author's more important writings connected with Islam were put to use together with a great number of his major works on the mission and the Christian faith.

One particular aspect of Dr Kraemer's expertise on Islam must be mentioned here. Dr Kraemer was trained as a scholar in the History of Religions. He always refused, however, to divorce his reflexion on the non-Christian religions from the perspective provided by the Christian faith. He himself wrote in Religion and the Christian Faith:

the real beginning and end of all understanding of religion is theological; that is to say, it starts and ends with taking sides in the great question: What do you think of God and Man? and, I would add: Which God do you choose?<sup>3</sup>

Which means that in our study of his writings, whether on non-Christian religions in general or on Islam in particular, there is no justification for a distinction of his views as a scholar pure and simple and those of the Christian thinker, at least not from the standpoint of this research.

The following propositions which we submit may help to define the character and mark off the limits of our survey. First of all, history must be considered an essential element of this dissertation. On the one hand, Dr Kraemer never abstracts from what has happened in the past or is still happening, in other words from history, when he reflects on the mission to Islam. On the other hand, our own conclusions must take into account the historical data provided by Dr Kraemer's writings and by the events of his life. With such data in mind, it is intended to throw light on what caused him to think in the way he did or to change his views whenever he did change them.

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<sup>3</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 52. Dr Kraemer in this quotation is making his own the views of Christopher Dawson in Religion and Culture, London, Sheed and Ward, 1948, p. 22.

Secondly, the field of this research is theology. The theology considered here is that of religions, of revelation and of mission. However, this theology does not come under scrutiny in an abstract manner, for its own purpose as it were, but as concretely apprehended and propounded by Dr Kraemer. Another remark must be made. While it is true that the history of religions is also connected with the subject matter of this research, it must be noted that it never concerns us in a direct way, but only indirectly insofar as the concept of Christian mission usually includes a reference to non-Christian religions (or to non-religion).

Thirdly, the focal point of this research is the mission to Islam according to Dr Hendrik Kraemer. The ultimate justification for our study lies in a description and understanding of Dr Kraemer's views on the Christian mission to Muslim collectivities. It must be emphasized that the meaning of mission in this context implies more than just a body of theoretical knowledge. It also extends to such attitudes and activities as may be suggested by Dr Kraemer for a praxis of the mission to Islam. Actually the quest for such a praxis was the prime motive for this research and remained its central concern.

We would mention before concluding these introductory notes that the polemical intention is totally absent from the

spirit of this research. Dr Kraemer's views did arouse controversy and are indeed on important points different from say the Anglican or the (Roman) Catholic traditions concerning various aspects of the Christian mission. The dialectic of controversy was taken into account to whatever extent it helped secure a more accurate comprehension of Dr Kraemer's missionary positions or of the reasons why he modified his opinions. The purpose of this composition is not to refute presumably erroneous conceptions in favour of supposedly correct ones. Our intent, if we may repeat it, is descriptive and interpretative but not normative. Criticism of Dr Kraemer's views is to be expressed only when it is impossible to see the consistency of these views with one another or their coherence within Dr Kraemer's own theological system of reference.

The question of polemic calls to mind that of bias. The writer in his own capacity as a missionary interested in Islam may be thought to be prejudiced in favour of Dr Kraemer. This kind of bias is rather a definite advantage since it is conducive to a more empathetic understanding of another missionary's insights and attitudes. Still, the writer of this dissertation belongs to an altogether different Christian tradition: he is a (Roman) Catholic missionary. The risk that his comprehension of Dr Kraemer's views on the mission may be impaired or distorted is real. Perhaps a thorough and

careful study of Dr Kraemer's works together with a critical awareness of the (Roman) Catholic Church's teaching on the nature of the Christian mission will have helped the author of these pages to avoid most pitfalls connected with confessional beliefs. It can only be hoped that this disposition did result in the kind of 'epochè' demanded by objectivity, or rather, to use Dr Kraemer's own preferred term, by impartiality.

Familiarity often breeds love. Repeated contact with Dr Kraemer's writings has confirmed and deepened our admiration for his dedication as a committed Christian and as a convinced missionary. Five years before his death, he wrote in an article for The Muslim World, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", the following profession of his missionary faith:

The Christian Church has the unalterable calling and obligation to transmit and offer the Message of Jesus Christ's universal claim on the obedience and faith of all men, to whatever religion, non-religion or culture they may belong. The Muslim world therefore is included in this missionary vision (...)<sup>4</sup>.

The same missionary vision, one may hope, describes in a fitting manner the inspiration that has guided these probings into Dr Kraemer's teaching on the Christian mission to Islam.

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<sup>4</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", in The Muslim World, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 1960, p. 248.

## CHAPTER I

### HENDRIK KRAEMER AND THE HOUSE OF ISLAM

Before we start looking into what Dr Hendrik Kraemer has to tell us about the mission to Islam, we must explain how he deepened his lifelong interest for Islam through his studies and travels and how he strove to keep his knowledge of the Muslim world up to date. What we propose to do in the following paragraphs is above all to show that his close acquaintance with the House of Islam grew from the painstaking research and the quest for truth that go into the making of a genuine scholar.

However, the hand of time already lies heavy on Dr Kraemer's memory and it will be necessary to offer a few notes also on some outstanding aspects of his life. Although our main purpose for the time being is to bring out in full relief his knowledge of Islam, we will also mention the marking events in his life and give some information on his most important writings. In this manner Dr Kraemer's sustained reflexion on Islam will not be divorced from the course of his career and from his other publications only indirectly connected with the problems of the mission to the Muslim world. Moreover, this is the best way to make sure that the theme of this research is rightly seen within its natural

setting<sup>1</sup>.

Hendrik Kraemer's very active life easily lends itself to a division into five periods. There was the time when he studied in order to get ready for the service of the mission in the Dutch East Indies. After those years of preparation he settled down in Java for twelve years and worked for the Dutch Bible Society. A third period in his life was spent on teaching at the University of Leiden and on bringing about a renewal of Church life in Holland. He then devoted himself to the Ecumenical Movement in Switzerland until 1955. After he had retired, the last years of his life were still busy with writing, lecturing and travelling until death overtook him in 1965.

#### 1. The Years of Preparation: 1905-1922.

Hendrik Kraemer was born in Amsterdam in 1888 and got his early education in an orphanage. In 1905 he was accepted into a missionary school of the Dutch Reformed Church in Rotterdam where he studied until 1910. The following year he entered the University at Leiden and he completed his studies of Eastern Religions, Languages and Ethnology in 1921.

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<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive study of Dr Kraemer's life up to 1958 was written by one of his former students, A. Th. van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk, Amsterdam, W. ten Have, 1959, 174 p. Most of the biographical notes contained here were borrowed from Van Leeuwen's book, henceforth referred to as Hendrik Kraemer.

At Leiden Hendrik Kraemer got to know Professor Snouck Hurgronje, a respected orientalist and Arabic scholar<sup>2</sup>. He it was that tutored Kraemer in his study of a Javanese text of the 16th century belonging to the mystical tradition of Indonesian Islam. The conclusions of Kraemer's research appeared in a doctoral dissertation entitled Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw<sup>3</sup>.

Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw

This dissertation is a highly specialized piece of work on a corrupt text of the 16th century<sup>4</sup>. This document reached Holland in 1597. It was first published in 1881 by

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2 The importance of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) is well brought out in J. Waardenburg, L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident, Paris, Mouton, 1969, p. 18-27. Disguised as an Arab, Hurgronje had managed to spend some time at Mecca. With Louis Massignon he stands out as one of the prominent islamologists of his time. In his book Parole donnée, Paris, Julliard, 1962, p. 401, Massignon refers to Hurgronje as "this great scholar on Islam to whom I owe quite precious advice on Muslim mysticism" (le grand islamisant à qui je dois de bien précieux conseils sur la mystique musulmane).

3 Hendrik Kraemer, Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw, Inleiding, vertaling en aantekeningen, Leiden, P.W.M. Trap, 1921, 239 p. This work will be referred to as Een javaansche Primbon.

4 Van Leeuwen in Hendrik Kraemer, p. 16, describes this Primbon as "an extremely interesting piece of literature issued within Muslim orthodoxy from the popular mysticism which flooded Java and even Sumatra" (een uiterst interessant litterair produkt van de populaire orthodox-mohammedaanse mystiek, welke op Java en ook wel op Sumatra is binnengestroomd).

J.G.H. Gunning, who discovered it lying together with other East Indian manuscripts in the collections of Leiden University. Only a specialist in Javanese literature and Muslim mysticism might make bold to discuss the author's conclusions. But one need be no expert to appreciate his scholarship as one sees him equally at ease in Middle Javanese, in Malay and in Arabic, picking out Malay idioms in Javanese garb, restoring distorted Arabic words and quotations, referring to Ghazzālī and Ibn 'Arabī or discussing Hindu mysticism and its influence on Javanese Islam.

It is interesting to note that while studying this Primbon Kraemer came across religious phenomena such as mysticism and syncretism which would always retain his attention as a Christian missionary and a student of religions. As regards Islam in particular, he goes into the vexed question of the place of sufism within the stream of Muslim orthodoxy<sup>5</sup>. He already shows himself quite reticent about the religious authenticity of mysticism in general.

According to Dr A. Jeffery, then of the American University in Cairo,

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5 Cf. Een javaansche Primbon, p. 71-109.

Dr Kraemer's study is not of value merely as a study of this particular sixteenth century Primbon, but provides much valuable illumination on the whole problem of these non-Islamic influences in the mystic life of Islam in the Dutch Indies.<sup>6</sup>

The non-Islamic influences mentioned by Dr Jeffery bring to mind another of Dr Kraemer's recurrent themes as a missionary writer, that of syncretism. Ancient animism Hindu tantrism and Muslim sufism all appeared to have been at work on the religious ideas contained in the Primbon scanned by Dr Kraemer and they offered to the student of religions an interesting example of syncretistic development<sup>7</sup>. All his life Dr Kraemer would show extreme caution towards foreign intrusions that might detract from true Christianity and could threaten the religious purity of the Gospel preached by missionaries in non-Christian lands.

Dr Kraemer's study of that Javanese product of Muslim mysticism was meant as a direct preparation to his work in Java where he was to act as adviser to the Netherlands Bible

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<sup>6</sup> A. Jeffery, Review article in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 11, No. 4, October 1922, p. 617. A summary of the same work appeared in Revue du monde musulman, Vol. 44, avril-juin 1921, p. 45-52. The reviewer, however, under the initials N.M., was content to report our author's conclusions without discussing them. In a long article "Introduction à l'étude de l'Islam indonésien", in Revue des études islamiques, Vol. 12, cahiers 2-3, 1938, p. 200, the French islamologist G.-H. Bousquet finds Dr Kraemer's judgment on Javanese mysticism "rather severe" (plutôt sévère).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Een javaansche Primbon, p. 110-123.

Society. However, before assuming his functions, he spent three months in Paris where he deepened his knowledge of Islam and religions in general under the guidance of such eminent authorities as Louis Massignon and Marcel Mauss who, according to Van Leeuwen, were lecturing at the Sorbonne<sup>8</sup>.

No doubt his most rewarding experience was the four months he spent afterwards, from November to March 1922, in a typical Muslim quarter of Cairo near al-Azhar University. He was then on his way to Java accompanied by his wife - they had married in 1919 - and this was his first direct contact with the Arab world.

The courteous Westerner, who settled down in Arab surroundings close to al-Azhar and went about with a fez on his head, soon became popular with the students and the staff of the small hotel where he was lodging. In those days European visitors were expected to live with their fellow-countrymen in special quarters of Cairo. At a time when such words as accommodation or adaptation had not yet found their fashionable way into missionary literature, it is surprising

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 16: "Drie maanden naar Parijs, om aan de Sorbonne onder het gehoor van grote Islam-kenners als Massignon en Mauss de verkregen inzichten te verruimen en verdiepen." At the time of Dr Kraemer's visit in Paris Louis Massignon (1883-1962) was 'professeur suppléant' at the Collège de France and Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) was teaching at the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris. Mauss was an outstanding ethnologist but had no specialized knowledge of Islam.

how much he had succeeded in getting close to the hearts of the local people, what with his attention to the details of etiquette and his obvious desire to learn from anyone. Much to his informants' delight, he would address them as Teacher or Professor. Thus in no time did he make friends who proved quite useful to him. One gentleman in particular, a teacher at a training school, shed the usual reserve of Muslims towards non-believers and set about broadening the knowledge of that European who already seemed to understand the faith of the Prophet so well. People took to calling him Sheikh, a title given in Islam to spiritual leaders or men of great learning. Still, as Van Leeuwen remarks,

In his many arguments with sheikhs on all kinds of topics, it struck Kraemer that for them a discussion means something different from what we seek in it, that is to say not a common search for the truth, but, cost what it may, an effort to carry one's own point.<sup>9</sup>

That lesson our future missionary would never forget.

Dr Kraemer in Cairo displayed the missionary qualities that were to remain his for the rest of his life: a genuine sympathy for the cultural character and religious convictions of the people to whom he would fain bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a growing awareness of the changes that were taking

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<sup>9</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 20: "In zijn vele disputen, die Kraemer met sheichs over allerlei onderwerpen voerde, viel hem op dat voor hen discussiëren wat anders is dan wij erin zoeken, n.l. niet samen de waarheid zoeken, maar het koste wat het wil trachten gelijk te krijgen."

place in various Islamic countries and a sustained interest for whatever new trends, social, political or religious, were appearing in the Muslim world at large. And never would he lose sight of his purpose, which was to bring Christ to the House of Islam.

Dr Kraemer carefully set down in writing the results of his experience in Cairo and sent his report to the Direction of the Netherlands Bible Society. This was but the first of a long series of live observations on the Muslim world<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. Adviser to the Christian Mission in Java: 1922-1938.

In 1922 Dr Kraemer left Egypt with his wife for the Dutch East Indies. He was beginning his missionary career at the age of thirty-four. Apart from his duties as adviser to the Bible Society, Islam would remain one of his chief concerns whilst he worked in Java. In that part of the colonial world he followed with close attention the emergence of a more militant form of Islam not devoid of political

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<sup>10</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Rapport van Dr H. Kraemer aangaande zijn verblijf te Cairo van 15 november - 13 maart 1922 aan het Hoofdbestuur van het Nederl. Bijbelgenootschap, Amsterdam, 1923. Quoted by C.F. Hallencreutz in his Kraemer Towards Tambaram. A Study in Hendrik Kraemer's Missionary Approach, Studia Missionalia VII, Lund, Gleerup, 1966, p. 315. Apart from its theological interest, this book contains very valuable information on Dr Kraemer's life up to 1938.

overtones. In 1923 he wrote down a detailed report of the Pan-Islamic Congress that had taken place the year before at Ciribon, near Bandung, on Java Island<sup>11</sup>. There already one notices the traits that would stand out in his future writings on non-Christian cultures and religions: his care for accuracy, his gift for observation, his understanding of internal tensions and not least his missionary preoccupations. He concludes his report with the warning that the congress

is likewise proof that the Mission in Java will ever be faced with new questions. It will for the future meet with an active instead of dormant Islam. This renders the work yet more important.<sup>12</sup>

This particular article has been singled out because it shows how closely Dr Kraemer was following what was taking place in the Muslim world of the East Indies. It must be pointed out that he kept reporting on Java for De Opwekker, a Dutch missionary monthly of his Church, from 1923 to 1935. He also wrote press reviews that appeared regularly from 1923 to 1927<sup>13</sup>. These press reviews were at first limited to the

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<sup>11</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Het eerste al-Islam congres te Cheribon", in Mededeelingen. Tijdschrift voor zendingswetenschap, Vol. 67, 1923, p. 362-374.

<sup>12</sup> Kraemer, ibid., p. 374: "Tevens is het een bewijs hoe de Zending op Java steeds voor nieuwe vragen zal komen te staan. Zij zal in de toekomst een werkenden, inplaats van een slapenden Islam ontmoeten. Dat maakt het werk nog belangrijker."

<sup>13</sup> Hallencreutz in his book Kraemer Towards Tambaram, p. 315-316, gives what apparently is a complete list of such articles.

local Javanese or Dutch Indian periodicals. But Dr Kraemer soon noticed the influence of the Muslim press from abroad which found its way into Java through Malay translations. He then extended his reviews to include important dailies and weeklies published in Egypt and British India.

In 1924 Dr Kraemer started reaching out from Java to the important English-speaking missionary circles. His first contribution to The International Review of Missions, "Spiritual Currents in Java", draws a general picture of Islam on the island<sup>14</sup>. He shows Islam making "the first feeble attempts to get into definite relation with the rest of the Moslem world."<sup>15</sup>

During his first tour in Java, from 1922 to 1927, Dr Kraemer found many a fast friend amongst the notables and leaders of the Muslim community. A number of people, however, particularly those of the younger and accordingly more suspicious generation, were well aware that his first loyalty lay with the Christian mission. That the more political-minded Muslims resented his influence makes sense. But that some of Dr Kraemer's own Dutch compatriots should look at his growing popularity with a green eye must have been

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<sup>14</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Spiritual Currents in Java", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 1924, p. 101-108.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

disconcerting. One of them even wrote in a local paper:

We consider it a great danger that in Central Java one of the most talented disciples of Professor Snouck Hurgronje should turn his knowledge of Islam and the Javanese language to account in order to help the Christian mission find better acceptance.<sup>16</sup>

Dr Kraemer was upset. His reply to that indictment gives a fair idea of his attitude as a missionary in Muslim surroundings. He wrote:

The Christian propaganda that I wished to make consisted in my desire to show that a thoroughly convinced Christian is only willing to serve. It is my hope to carry out that kind of Christian propaganda in Java with ever renewed strength and dedication.<sup>17</sup>

And he points out that in a periodical which had been using his advice there had appeared many a plea in behalf of Islam, but none ever for Christianity.

During Dr Kraemer's first year in the Indies something occurred that would help him further define his own position on the mission to Islam. Dr S.M. Zwemer, an American missionary best remembered as the founder of The Moslem World<sup>18</sup>,

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<sup>16</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 27: "Wij achten het een groot gevaar, dat in Midden-Java een der kundigste leerlingen van Prof. Snouck Hurgronje zijn kennis van de Islam en van de Javaanse taal gebruikt, om de christelijke zending beter ingang te doen vinden."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: "De christelijke propaganda, die ik heb willen maken, heeft daarin bestaan dat ik tonen wilde, dat een ernstig overtuigd christen eenvoudig wil dienen. Deze christelijke propaganda hoop ik op Java steeds krachtiger en toegewijder te kunnen voeren."

<sup>18</sup> First published in New York in 1911. It is known as The Muslim World since 1948.

came on a lecturing tour. Dr Zwemer had acquired missionary experience in Arabia and in the Muslim countries of the Near East. His was a very militant, not to say aggressive, way of dealing with Islam. That attitude of his was very much in evidence during his visit of Java and Sumatra, which led an old Muslim to remark that he would gladly give away Kraemer in exchange for Zwemer. Kraemer, he remarked, with his willingness to listen and to help, constituted a far greater threat to Islam than Zwemer's fiery brand of proselytism. Dr Zwemer's demeanour in Java only confirmed Dr Kraemer in his view that all derogatory attitudes would only string up the sensitive chords of Islam and arouse its passion for controversy. This was not the way to go about bringing Jesus Christ to Muslims.

#### Agama Islam

Dr Kraemer thought that nothing could ever replace a deep understanding of Islam, indeed he regarded it as the first essential. Consequently he planned a series of lectures in Malay on the history and doctrine of the Muslim faith for Christian community leaders in training and educated Christians in general. These courses were later collected and published in two volumes entitled Agama Islam (The Religion of Islam), the first volume appearing in 1928<sup>19</sup> and the

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<sup>19</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Agama Islam, Djilid jang pertama, Bandoeng, N.V. v/h A.C. Nix & Co., 1928, 95 p.

second in 1933<sup>20</sup>. There is irony in the fact that this is the only book that Dr Kraemer, who wrote repeatedly on one or the other aspect of the faith and history of Muslims, ever managed to put together on Islam as a whole.

In his preface the author states that he does not intend to offer a refutation of Islam and points out that his publication "is based on the work and results of European scholars who have studied the manifold aspects of Islam"<sup>21</sup>. The first volume is divided into two parts, the one studying the origins and extension of Islam and the other analysing its foundations. In the first part of the book one chapter describes Arabia and the life of its people at the time of Muḥammad. This is followed by chapters on the Prophet and the beginnings of Islam, on Muḥammad at Medina and finally on the history of the Islamic world. The second part deals at length with the formation of the Koran, its nature and contents, and with the religious bases of Islam: the Koran, the tradition of the Prophet (hadīth and sunna) the consensus of the community (idjmā') and the principle of analogy (qiyās).

The Christians of the Dutch East Indies must have found in their particular circumstances the second volume of

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<sup>20</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Agama Islam, Djilid jang kedoea, N.V. Christelijke Boekhandel voor Ned.-Indië, 1933, 119 p.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, "Pendahoeloean" (Introduction): "Karangannja beralaskan oesaha dan pendapatan kaoem arifin bangsa Eropah jang mempeladjari seloek-beloeknja agama Islam itoe."

Agama Islam even more handy and more instructive than the first. Three of its chapters explain the legal prescriptions of Islam, a fourth speaks of Muslim theology and another of mysticism. The last chapter of this volume describes the historical background and contemporary situation of Islam in the Dutch Indies. This second book contains a great deal of material bearing directly on Muslim practices and observances. Dr Kraemer dwells at length on such important subjects as prayer, religious taxes, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca. He explains Islamic regulations concerning the family, marriage, inheritance and burial.

Although his purpose is not polemical, the author often underlines differences on kindred themes between the Christian and the Muslim doctrines. About the Koran and Holy Scripture he writes for instance:

The view of Muslims, it would appear, is that the Lord God is telling them: "I have made you a present of a Book to be my representative and your leader." The view of Christians, on the contrary, is that the Lord God tells them: "I have made you a present of my Son to be my representative and your Deliverer."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 1, p. 62: "Orang Islam, roepanja, ada pendapatannja bahwa Toehan Allah bersabda kepadanja: "Akoë mengaroeniakan Kitab kepadamoe, jang djadi wakilkoe dan pengandjoermoe." Sebaliknja ada pendapatn Maséhi, bahwa Toehan Allah bersabda: "Akoë mengaroeniakan Poeterakoe kepadamoe jang djadi wakilkoe dan Pelepasmoe." Dr Kraemer's italics.

The views expressed in Agama Islam on a number of questions will again be found in Dr Kraemer's later writings. Our Islamologist has already made up his mind on a number of points. He insists on the change in Muhammad's role from that of a purely religious leader to that of a political ruler, on the twofold character of Islam as a theocratic and political community and on its legalistic bent as a religion. Of the three religious communities that make up the Muslim world, the Sunnites, the Shiites and the Kharijites, Dr Kraemer considers that the last are the true democrats of Islam<sup>23</sup>. His admiration for Ghazzālī is such that he compares him to Augustine in the Christian Church<sup>24</sup>. He contends that Islam does not say much about God's relationship with man. Thus he writes:

Should we wish to know who is God through a study of Muslim theology, we shall surely be disappointed. There is no fruit to be collected from such a study except this one: There is God, Almighty and Allknowing. From all these attributes, man cannot know ever so little what the heart and sentiments of God towards man are like.<sup>25</sup>

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23 Cf. Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 2, p. 61.

24 Cf. ibid., Vol. 1, p. 80.

25 Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 75: "Djikalau kita hendak mengetahoei siapakah Allah dengan mempeladjar iilmoe-agama agama Islam, tentoe ketjéwa. Tidak ada hasil jang kita dapat daripada peladjaran itoe melainkan jang seboeah ini: Allah ada, Mahakoeasa dan Mahatahoe. Dari segala sifat itoe manoesia tiada mendapat tahoe sedikitpoen bagaimana hatinja, perasaannja Allah itoe kepada manoesia." Dr Kraemer's italics.

It is easy to imagine the amount of work that went into Agama Islam and the specialized knowledge that its composition required. Still, the work is not without blemishes: repetitions do abound and the explanations are at times quite involved. Malay in Dr Kraemer's time was an unwieldy tool with which to translate theological concepts, particularly those issued from a tradition common to both Islam and Christianity. It is certain, however, that for all its defects Agama Islam gave Indonesian Christians a knowledge of Islam which was more than adequate to the needs of people living in daily converse with Muslim believers.

It had been Dr Kraemer's intention when writing his book on Islam to stick to the facts in all impartiality. He also felt that some information concerning, for instance, Muhammad's character and behaviour could not be omitted. This was a ticklish matter. Certain passages could be regarded as offensive and were so considered by educated Muslims who protested angrily against the publishing of the book<sup>26</sup>.

Although the two volumes of Agama Islam came out after Dr Kraemer's first tour in the Dutch East Indies, its

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<sup>26</sup> Some of those passages were left out or amended in the third printing which was revised by Dr C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze and came out as a single volume: Agama Islam, Djakarta, Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1952, 308 p. The book still carried Dr Kraemer's name. One may compare inter alia pages 14, 22, 28 and 52 in the first edition of Vol. I with pages 25, 34, 42 and 68 of the second edition.

material had actually been gathered during those first years. Besides his occupations as a linguist and a writer, his activities extended to yet other fields. The Dutch Reformed Church sought his advice on missionary problems in some areas of the colony and he thus visited Celebes and the Moluccas. His observations and recommendations were laid down in detailed reports of his visits.

Towards the end of 1927, after six years of uninterrupted service, Dr Kraemer came up for leave. The time of his travelling home would coincide with the World Missionary Conference due to take place in Jerusalem from the 19th March to the 1st April 1928. To the Bible Society in Java it seemed only natural that Dr Kraemer should stand in for their missionaries working in the Dutch East Indies.

In Jerusalem Dr Kraemer was given the chair of the section dealing with Islam. During the debates he soon drew the attention of the delegates by the conviction and the pointedness of his interventions. One theme that quickly dominated the discussions was that of the relation of Christianity to the non-Christian religions. There was much talk about the values to be found in those religions, so much so that Dr Kraemer reminded his colleagues "that the Gospel did not represent one value between other values, but was the message of the Risen Lord, who was the Way, the Truth and

the Life"<sup>27</sup>.

No doubt he thought that a lot of confusion prevented the members of the Conference from fully grasping the points at issue. He contributed a written statement on "The need of a clearer and more comprehensive view"<sup>28</sup>. On that occasion, he made a remark that to us sounds like a harbinger of things to come. Speaking of the missionaries he said that "they needed a prophet and thinker of the first rank"<sup>29</sup>. Little did he dream that ten years later not a few missionaries would see in him that prophet and thinker.

Two years later in an article written for The International Review of Missions, "Christianity and Secularism"<sup>30</sup>, Dr Kraemer draws some conclusions from the debates at the Jerusalem Conference. He sees the relation of Christianity

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27 Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 48: "(...) dat het Evangelie niet een waarde tussen andere waarden vertegenwoordigt, doch de Boodschap is van de Opgestane Heer, die de Weg, de Waarheid en het Leven is."

28 Cf. The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems, Vol. 1 of the Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24th - April 8th, 1928, London, Oxford University Press, 1928, p. 347-349.

29 Ibid., p. 347.

30 Hendrik Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 19, No. 2, April 1930, p. 195-208.

to secularism as "a problem of decisive importance for the future"<sup>31</sup>, not only in so-called Christian countries, but also in mission lands. Against this background, he writes, "Barth's theology gives to the problem of Christianity and secularism the greatest tension imaginable"<sup>32</sup>. He would eventually regard the phenomenon of secularism as raising a problem not only for Christianity but for all great religions in general, and especially for Islam in its encounter with the secularized world of Western culture.

The most striking feature of this article, however, is its author's insistence on revelation. Whether it is the influence of Barth's writings, or the impact of the discussions at Jerusalem, or a combination of the two, may not be easy to decide. One thing is certain. There is in that short piece of writing, where the word and idea of revelation recur so often, an indication that from now on Dr Kraemer's thinking would be steered in its development by the fact of God's revelation and that this revelation would become the kingpin of his theology. The author set the goal for his own reflexion when he stated that what was now needed was "a journey of research into the original dynamics of the divine

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31 Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", p. 195.

32 Ibid., p. 198. Together with that of Barth, the presence of Kierkegaard is very much in evidence in this article.

revelation"<sup>33</sup>.

Let us note finally that our missionary is not satisfied with a certain manner of Christian apologetic. He writes:

Apologetic in the usual meaning of the term tends to an effort to make Christianity acceptable. The apologetic which is needed, and which is at the same time in accordance with the fact that it is dealing with the revelation of God, does not try to make the Gospel acceptable, but unescapable as an inevitable appeal and challenge to the world.<sup>34</sup>

In 1929, on his return to Java from his home leave, Dr Kraemer had his first personal experience of Islam in British India. The Y.M.C.A. in that country intended to start some intense work amongst Muslim students and they asked him to look into the situation of Indian Islam. His reputation as an expert on things Islamic had already reached beyond the frontiers of the Dutch territories.

Before the partition of India in 1947 Islam accounted for an active and powerful minority in that country and Dr Kraemer was only too willing to get acquainted at first

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<sup>33</sup> Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", p. 206.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 205. The striking opposition "not acceptable but unescapable" had all the makings of a successful catchword. A distinguished missionary, Dr John A. Mackay, who became in 1947 Chairman of the International Missionary Council, used it three years later in an article on "The Theology of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 1933, p. 187. Dr Kraemer is not quoted; but was the phrase his own in the first place?

hand with that part of the Muslim world. Moreover, the cultural influence of Hinduism which had "left such deep traces in Javanese life"<sup>35</sup> was an added incentive to agree to the service required of him.

So he went to India, spending three months on his travels, visiting the most important centres of Muslim life in the north and stopping for some time at Hyderabad in the south. The things that he saw, the customs that he observed and the people that he met, all was grist to his mill and went to increase his knowledge of Islam. Some of his reflexions and conclusions would come out in a number of articles and eventually provide important material for his best-known work, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World<sup>36</sup>. A remarkable report of his tour through India soon appeared in The Moslem World<sup>37</sup>.

By the beginning of 1930 Dr Kraemer was back in the East Indies, tackling new problems and rendering further service to the missionaries of his Church. The missionaries

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35 Kraemer, "Spiritual Currents in Java", p. 107.

36 Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p. Future references to this important work will quote only the first part of the title, The Christian Message.

37 Hendrik Kraemer, "Islam in India Today", in The Moslem World, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1931, p. 151-176. In a footnote the editor comments that "this report is too valuable to admit any abbreviation, so want of space compelled us to put it in smaller type." Ibid., p. 151.

in Batakland were especially eager to profit by his counsels. The country of the Batak people lay in the western part of Sumatra. After sixty years of missionary work, it had developed a large Christian community thriving in Muslim surroundings. This community was destined to play a significant role in the encounter between Christianity and Islam.

Dr Kraemer's second tour in Java lasted from 1930 to 1935. Much of what he achieved there, such as his efforts towards the autonomy of the young Churches or his revision of the Malay translation of the Bible, is of no immediate interest to us.

We cannot ignore, however, how he made history through his firm stand on behalf of the Christian mission in Bali. Since 1881 Bali, together with some other territories of the Dutch East Indies, had been kept out of bounds for the workers of the Gospel. But in 1930, in spite of the more or less official policy of the Dutch administration, the Christian and Missionary Alliance from America had been granted permission to resume apostolic work on the island. Things came to a head in 1932 when rumours of renewed missionary undertakings amongst the Balinese led to a clamour of indignation that echoed far beyond the exotic sweeps of the Indonesian shores. Pressure was brought to bear upon the colonial authorities in order to put a stop to the zeal of the

missionaries on the island.

Dr Kraemer did not hesitate to take up the cudgels on behalf of the mission. He made a thorough analysis of the cultural situation of the Balinese people and put forward the claims of the Christian mission in a publication called De strijd over Bali en de Zending<sup>38</sup>. It is to be credited to his clear exposition and forceful argumentation that missionary work was in the end resumed in Bali. Regarding the effect of missionary work on the local culture Dr Kraemer had this to say:

It is not correct to view the Bali issue in the light of this contrast: either preservation and protection of Balinese culture or annihilation of this culture as a result of missions. I do not say this in order to allot to missions the role of saving Balinese culture. This can and never should be its (sic) aim. The aim of missions is to preach the Gospel and to be engaged in building religious and moral foundations. In this work it will have to direct its honest efforts towards finding a Balinese form in which Christianity can be expressed.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De strijd over Bali en de Zending, Een studie en een appèl, Amsterdam, H.J. Paris, 1933, 141 p. Cf. also an abridged translation of this book, "The Controversy around Bali and Missions", in From Missionfield to Independent Church, London, SCM Press, 1953, p. 159-186. Future references to this book will quote only From Missionfield. For shorter accounts of the controversy cf. A. Vandenbosch, "Missions on the Island of Bali", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 1934, p. 205-214, and H.-R. Weber, Asia and the Ecumenical Movement: 1895-1961, London, SCM Press, 1966, p. 170-179.

<sup>39</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 183.

And he takes to task in no uncertain terms an administration that "admits as a matter of course e.g. tourism, which lowers the religion of the Balinese to a peep-show," while "Christianity, which represents the best things of Europe, is artificially kept at a distance"<sup>40</sup>.

When relating the Bali incident, we referred to From Missionfield to Independent Church, a book which was published only in 1958. Actually the contents of that book consist of some of the reports Dr Kraemer wrote during his stay in the Dutch Indies. These reports show our missionary at his best: a man who undoubtedly has definite ideas about the Christian mission and at the same time knows how to keep his feet solidly planted on the ground, in short a well-balanced mixture of vision and common sense.

Dr Kraemer's understanding of the economic and social conditions of the local populations is always factual<sup>41</sup>. His remarks on the ways of the indigenous Christians throw light on their puzzling states of mind: they often regard themselves as superior because they are Christians<sup>42</sup>, yet they do not mind their dependence upon the missionaries<sup>43</sup> and they

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<sup>40</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 184.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 13-24.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 16-17.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 84-92.

prefer to live secluded from their Muslim compatriots<sup>44</sup>.

Dr Kraemer's reports are those of a Christian who refuses to hide unpleasant truths<sup>45</sup> even when he feels in full sympathy with the missionaries in their difficulties, and they reveal a missionary interested in people for their own sakes and not as mere objects of conversion<sup>46</sup>. His advice is always to the point. It deals with real problems such as that of presenting the Christian doctrine of sin and grace<sup>47</sup> or that of making Christianity more attractive to Eastern minds<sup>48</sup>. No missionary can read those reports without feeling that the practical questions which came up in his daily life on the missions are precisely those that caught Dr Kraemer's attention. Understandably enough, From Missionfield to Independent Church ranks with the best in the field of missionary literature.

From the special perspective of the mission to Islam, the reports of Dr Kraemer derive their value from what their author tells us about the difficulties of that mission and about the relations of Christian communities with the Muslims.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 126-127.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 134.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 127.

They also contain elements of solution and practical suggestions based on his own experience with Islam. Two reports in particular deal with those questions which will be discussed later<sup>49</sup>.

All the while the developments taking place in the Muslim world kept retaining Dr Kraemer's attention. In 1935 he wrote a long article on the apologetics of Islam in modern times<sup>50</sup>. This essay on the apologists of Egypt and India offers a survey of various reactions of Islam in its confrontation with Western culture. Dr Kraemer's thorough knowledge of Muslim literature - and his admiration for Ghazzālī - is fully displayed in that piece of writing which deserves more than a passing mention.

The article does not come from the pen of the missionary: it is written by the scholar trained in the history of religions. As the author points out in his opening paragraph: "In what we shall now present, we are leaving completely aside the century-old controversy between Islam, Judaism and Christianity"<sup>51</sup>. Rather his intention is to look

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49 Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 55-61 and 112-117.

50 Hendrik Kraemer, "Eenige grepen uit de moderne Apologie van den Islam", in Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde, Vol. 75, No. 1, 1935, p. 1-35; No. 2, 1935, p. 165-217. In future references this article will be quoted as "Eenige grepen".

51 Ibid., p. 1: "Wij laten in hetgeen hieronder geboden zal worden de eeuwenoude controverse tusschen Islam, Jodendom en Christendom geheel ter zijde."

at Islam as Islam looks at itself and from the point of view of the relation between revelation and reason. As he writes: "In dealing with our subject we shall confine ourselves to the conflict between Islam and culture, or revelation and reason"<sup>52</sup>.

Generally speaking, Dr Kraemer tells us, writers in Egypt and India have tackled the problem of Muslim apologetics in their own different ways. It is true that in both countries apologists are eager to vindicate Islam in the public forum of the world, particularly the Western world, together with the intellectual, cultural, social and political ideals that the Muslim faith is said to stand for. But there is a difference in spirit between the two groups of writers. The Egyptian apologists are bent on the restoration of the all-integrated and closely-knit system of the Muslim theocracy and they are quite willing to that end to use the tools provided by Western civilization. As for the Muslim writers of India, whilst stressing their fidelity to their faith, they would in the main favour a broadening of traditional Islam and the acceptance of Western ideas and achievements. The former remain confirmed theocratists in the face of threatening secularization; the latter are chiefly concerned

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<sup>52</sup> Kraemer, "Eenige grepen", p. 2: "Bij de behandeling van ons onderwerp willen wij ons echter bepalen tot het conflict Islam en Cultuur of Openbaring en Rede (...)"

with ethical and cultural renewal within Islam. In either case the arguments may well be the same, but the orientation is different. At any rate, and Dr Kraemer insists on this, the most pressing problem of Islam in modern times is its refusal to face secularization. This is a fact that he would again stress in his other writings.

Our author's vast knowledge of classical and modern Arabic literature can be gathered from the numerous references and quotations in this article on Muslim apologetics. He also shows himself quite familiar with the works of German, French and English islamologists. Critics and reviewers might one day complain that some of his most popular books, such as The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, show a distressing lack of references, leaving many of his statements unsubstantiated. The student of Dr Kraemer's writings need only read "Eenige grepen uit de moderne apologie van den Islam" to be convinced that it is not for want of adequate scientific knowledge that our author at times ignores the so-called critical apparatus.

Dr Kraemer's article on Muslim apologetics was published in 1935. That same year he went back to Holland on his second leave. A year or so later the leaders of the International Missionary Council asked him to get together some background material for the World Missionary Conference of 1938 which was to take place at Tambaram near Madras in

India<sup>53</sup>. This was published as The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, four hundred and fifty pages of very serious and at times quite arduous reading but by far the best-known of Dr Kraemer's writings. As we are not dealing here with its author's theory of the mission, we will limit our remarks to a few points of particular interest.

The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World

The Christian Message is important for a study of Dr Kraemer's ideas on the mission to the Muslim world. In presenting Islam to his readers Dr Kraemer follows the scheme that he uses in his book for other non-Christian religions. He first gives a description of Islam when he deals with "The Non-Christian Systems of Life and Thought". This section outlines the character and main features of Islam as a religious system<sup>54</sup>. In another part of his book he draws a picture of modern Islam when he writes about "The Present Religious

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53 The meeting is known as either the Madras or the Tambaram Conference. Tambaram is a small village, fifteen miles from Madras, where the Madras Christian College had its campus. A possible siting first in Hong Kong (Kowloon), then in China (Hangchow), had already been contemplated. Some Chinese delegates objected to Hong Kong, the Sino-Japanese war further excluded China or Japan. Finally, since it was felt that the Conference should be held in Asia, Madras was the place agreed upon. Cf. W.R. Hogg, Ecumenical Foundations. A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth-Century Background, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1952, p. 286-289 and 423, note 1.

54 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 215-226.

Situation in the Non-Christian World"<sup>55</sup>. He is in fact reviewing contemporary conditions in some of the countries belonging to the House of Islam. Finally, when discussing "The Missionary Approach", he looks into the special problems facing the Christian mission in its work within Muslim collectivities<sup>56</sup>.

Dr Kraemer's views on Islam as they appear in The Christian Message will receive our attention later. Other points arising from the book may be explained here, albeit in a brief manner, since they make up the framework of his missionary thinking. Those points are of a technical nature, so to speak, and could rightly be regarded as Kraemerian conceptions. The remarks that follow deal with them: they are the concept of biblical realism, the Kraemerian use of the dialectic and the classification of religions.

The most striking expression in The Christian Message is a phrase coined by Dr Kraemer: 'biblical realism'. What matters here is not the aptness of the terms but what their author means by them. All through The Christian Message revelation is the basic fact of the Christian faith, since this faith goes back "to the revelation of a connected series

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55 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 268-283.

56 Cf. ibid., p. 353-365.

of divine acts"<sup>57</sup>. If Dr Kraemer insists on using the phrase 'biblical realism', so much so that revelation itself seems to fade into the background, one can think of two reasons for it. Why 'biblical'? Because, to use our author's words, "The only legitimate source from which to take our knowledge of the Christian faith in its real substance is the Bible"<sup>58</sup>. The Church and its missionaries then should know where to look for a constant renewal of their faith. Why 'realism'? Because, Dr Kraemer explains, in the Bible God and his acts are taken altogether earnestly. That is his way of reminding his readers that the Bible is a radically theocentric book since it "takes in a radically serious fashion the fact that God is God, that He is the Absolute Sovereign and the only rightful Lord (...)"<sup>59</sup>. Biblical realism provides the Christian and the missionary with light and guidance. The following quotation sets forth quite clearly the latent implications of Dr Kraemer's famous idiom:

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57 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 61.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., p. 63.

The radical religious realism of the Biblical revelation, in which all religious and moral life revolves around one point only, namely, the creative and redemptive Will of the living, holy righteous God of Love, the exclusive ground of nature and history, of man and the world, has to be the standard of reference.<sup>60</sup>

Our second point calls for a comment on the use Dr Kraemer makes of the dialectic. The Kraemerian dialectic is related to that of the crisis theologians such as Barth and Brunner and, not necessarily through them, to that of Kierkegaard as well<sup>61</sup>. Like any other modern dialectic, it arises from and consists in the co-existence of antitheses, oppositions and even contradictions. It does not merely belong to the logical order; it is existential. It is to be found in attitudes, dispositions and situations. Dr Kraemer refers to this existential dialectic when he speaks of dialectical approach, dialectical condition and dialectical

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<sup>60</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 83. E.C. Dewick took exception to what he called the "dogmas" of biblical realism in his book The Gospel and Other Faiths, London, The Canterbury Press, 1948, p. 111-116.

<sup>61</sup> Dr Kraemer did in fact stress that he owes more to Kierkegaard than to Barth. In an answer to Prof. Haitjema, "Theologie en het kerkelijk vraagstuk", published in Onder eigen vaandel, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 1942, p. 17, he writes: "The only ones to whom I know myself to be deeply indebted, as far as theological thinking is concerned, are Paul, Pascal, Kierkegaard and also, although in a lesser way, Blumhardt and Barth." Dr Kraemer's italics. Dr Hallencreutz in his otherwise exhaustive Kraemer Towards Tambaram did not think it necessary or important to look into this. (De eenigen bij wie ik, wat theologisch denken betreft, mij diep in de schuld weet te staan zijn: Paulus, Pascal, Kierkegaard, en ook, hoewel minder: Blumhardt en Barth.) Dr Kraemer's italics.

view. The meanings conveyed by the adjective 'dialectical' under Dr Kraemer's pen are not perfectly synonymous or univocal. Therefore a few quotations will yield more information than involved explanations would.

First of all, concerning God, our author finds in the Bible that the disposition of the divine Will towards man is dialectical. Hence he writes:

God's love is holy love, and therefore radical love. Because God loves man, the sinner, radically, He condemns him radically. His holy condemnation of sin and the sinner is a sign of His love, because disregarding the reality of sin would be indulgence, not love.<sup>62</sup>

Likewise the Church in its relation to the world should model itself on God as the Bible reveals Him to us. Its attitude too should be dialectical. This, Dr Kraemer observes, can only be achieved on two conditions: the Church must never forget that it is built on a prophetic witness to God's judgment on the world; moreover, and nonetheless, its attitude towards the world must be essentially positive. These two conditions, he continues,

indicate clearly the dialectical relation in which Christianity, if true to its nature and mission, ought to stand to the world - the combination of a fierce "yes" and at the same time a fierce "no" to the world: the human and broken reflection of the divine "no" and "yes" of the holy God of reconciliation, who held the world under His absolute judgment and at the same time claimed it for His love.<sup>63</sup>

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62 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 79.

63 Ibid., p. 104. Dr Kraemer's italics.

We may pause for a moment and reflect on a matter that is easily overlooked. When commenting on the dialectic of Dr Kraemer one often forgets that in these two cases, namely that of God and that of the Church, what prevails in the end is the positive part of the contradiction, or, to put it more existentially, that the 'yes' and the 'no' are finally reconciled or dissolved or taken up together in the mystery of God's love for man and in the fulfilment of the Church's service to the world. Dr Kraemer states in so many words that "above the dialectical unity of yes and no, however, there rises triumphantly an ultimate divine yes in God's saving Will towards mankind and the world"<sup>64</sup>.

In a slightly different application the adjective 'dialectical' is also predicated of the condition of man, as our author explains in a footnote:

To avoid obscurity the reader is informed that by "dialectical" is meant this condition, inherent in man, of saying at the same time yes and no to his true destiny and his relatedness to the eternal.<sup>65</sup>

That the author felt the need for this remark shows well enough that the word 'dialectical' when applied to man's condition undergoes a shift in meaning. Man's condition is dialectical, but not in the sense that God's turn of will

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<sup>64</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 126.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 113, note 1.

towards man is said to be dialectical. In fact, when referring to man Dr Kraemer's obviously prefers to speak of disharmony<sup>66</sup>.

The term 'dialectical' is further used to describe a theological way of looking at the non-Christian religions. One will notice how the following words of Dr Kraemer suppose what we have already explained about his conception of biblical realism. The right approach to non-Christian religions Dr Kraemer describes in this way:

Speaking from the standpoint of the revelation in Christ, who is the Measure of all things, the "dialectical" approach, which is included in the view that the revelation in Christ has of all human existence, is the only right one by means of which to acquire a true and adequate insight. In this view the loftiest heights and the basest depths of all religious life are laid bare with radical realism and meet their due recognition or judgment, because only in the light of the revelation in Christ are the greatness and misery of man adequately unveiled.<sup>67</sup>

Since this dialectical condition of man is reflected in the spiritual systems he creates for himself, it follows that a search for points of contact between man's religions and God's revelation is bound to end in failure. Absolute discontinuity is the most fitting way of picturing the chasm that separates natural religion from the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Non-Christian religions cannot lead to Jesus

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66 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 113.

67 Ibid., p. 146.

Christ nor is Jesus Christ to be regarded as their fulfilment.

Dr Kraemer labours this point when he states that

in the light of the dialectical situation of all religious life and of all religions, and in the light of the dialectical view of this religious life in Biblical realism, points of contact in the real deep sense of the word can only be found by antithesis. This means by discovering in the revealing light of Christ the fundamental misdirection that dominates all religious life and at the same time the groping for God which throbs in this misdirection, and which finds an unsuspected divine solution in Christ.<sup>68</sup>

Our last remark bears on Dr Kraemer's division of religions in two classes which he explains as follows:

The most pertinent division is that into prophetic religions of revelation and naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization. Under the first heading fall Christianity, Judaism, and, as being historically and by its nature related to the Christian and Jewish background, to a certain degree also Islam. All the other religions can be brought under the category of naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization.<sup>69</sup>

To be complete, let us add that Dr Kraemer sees in all naturalist religions two common traits. In the first place, those religious systems are all rooted in a monistic

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68 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 139.

69 Ibid., p. 142. W. Holsten accepts Dr Kraemer's classification of religions in his Das Kerygma und der Mensch. Einführung in die Religions- und Missionswissenschaft. Theologische Bücherei, Systematische Theologie, Band 1, München, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1953, p. 93-96; but J.H. Bavinck does not in The Church Between the Temple and the Mosque. A Study of the Relationship Between the Christian Faith and Other Religions, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966, p. 28-29.

apprehension of the universe and, secondly, they all aim at procuring man's self-achievement through his personal efforts. Our author further accounts for the phrase 'religion of trans-empirical realization' on the ground that those religions would provide man with "means towards realizing and grasping the identity of his real self with divine reality"<sup>70</sup>.

The Kraemerian views that we have just outlined, those in particular concerning biblical realism and the dialectical approach to religions, came in for some hot criticism at Tambaram, and The Christian Message was received with mixed feelings. There were those who did not approve of its author's dialectical conception of revelation or felt that his theology was too redolent of the Barthian influence. There were also the delegates from Asia, a majority of them, who reacted

with an attitude of protest against what they felt was a dangerous incitement to intellectual collusion (?) and injustice towards the spiritual history, with its many-splendoured glory, of the cultural world in which they were born.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 143, note 1.

<sup>71</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 108: "De meesten stonden echter in een houding van protest tegen wat zij meenden te moeten voelen als een gevaarlijke uitnodiging tot geestesvereniging (?) en tot onrecht tegenover de veelszins roemrijke geestesgeschiedenis van het cultuurgebied waarbinnen zij geboren waren." Van Leeuwen obviously quotes, although without acknowledgment, from Dr Kraemer's book Van godsdiensten en mensen. Reïndrukken van een Tambaram-ganger, Wijkerk, Callenbach, 1940, p. 29. But Dr Kraemer does not speak of 'geestesvereniging', but of 'geestesverenging', i.e. narrow-mindedness, which is no doubt the right word in that context.

It is true that many passages of Dr Kraemer's book must have made painful reading for the representatives issued from the great Eastern civilizations. Urged by a sense of crisis in the missions and the ever-present threats of relativism and syncretism, Dr Kraemer had made the mistake of speaking straight from the shoulder. He had been advised to do so. When the Ad Interim Committee of the International Missionary Council had commissioned him to write his book, its chairman, John R. Mott, had urged him "to hit them hard". At Madras, however, Dr Mott soon found out which way the wind was blowing and with a shrewdness best-at home in politicians toned down Dr Kraemer's official status at the Conference: the Dutch missionary was not even invited to address the delegates in General Assembly<sup>72</sup>. But Dr Kraemer, for all his iron-clad convictions and blunt ways of putting them, was a selfless man. His cooperation to the Conference remained complete and unstinted throughout. Notwithstanding much heated opposition and clever refutation The Christian Message made its author's name a household word in missionary circles. Prof. Gualtieri rightly assessed the impact of Dr Kraemer's book when he wrote that its doctrine "became the unavoidable standard against which to formulate one's own

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72 Cf. Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 107-108. Also W.R. Hogg, Ecumenical Foundations, p. 294-296 and H.-R. Weber, Asia and the Ecumenical Movement: 1895-1961, p. 182-184.

views of the relationship of Christian to non-Christian faith"<sup>73</sup>.

### 3. University Professor and Church Leader in Holland: 1938-1947.

As Dr Kraemer was stringing together the long chapters of The Christian Message, he already knew that his life would shortly enter upon a new course. In 1937, on his return from a lecturing tour in America, he learned that he had been appointed Professor of the History of Religions in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leiden.

During the years 1937 to 1939, that is to say until the war broke out in Europe, he still managed to write two

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<sup>73</sup> A.R. Gualtieri, Theological Evaluations by Christians of the Religious Faith of Non-Christians, Unpublished Dissertation for the Ph.D., Department of Divinity, McGill University, Montreal, 1969, p. 27. For critical reviews of The Christian Message, cf. G.E. Phillips, "The Christian Message", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 27, No. 2, July 1938, p. 526-530; D.S. Cairns, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions", ibid., Vol. 28, No. 1, January 1939, p. 124-132; P.J. de Menasce, "La théologie de la mission selon M. Kraemer", in Nouvelle revue de science missionnaire/Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, Vol. 1, October 1945, p. 241-257. The concluding remarks of Rev. de Menasce are worth quoting: "I wish that many of the future Catholic missionaries shall read this book: not only because they will find in it a mind more open and a directness of judgment more outspoken than are usually met with in this kind of literature, but in order especially to acquire a more acute consciousness of the ties that link all missionary problems to the basic dogmas of our faith" (p. 257). (Je souhaite que beaucoup de futurs missionnaires catholiques lisent ce livre: non seulement parce qu'ils y trouveront un regard plus ouvert et une franchise de jugement plus explicite que de coutume dans cette littérature, mais surtout pour qu'ils prennent une conscience plus avisée du rattachement de tous les problèmes missionnaires aux dogmes fondamentaux de notre foi.)

or three essays on subjects connected with Islam. The most important of those is a small book that appeared in 1938, De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem<sup>74</sup>, in which he reflects on the mystery of Islam, both as a religious system and as an object of missionary endeavour. In 1939 The Moslem World printed further material from our author, "A Modern Revindication of Islam"<sup>75</sup>, a study on the ideas of a well-known Indian writer, A.M. Iqbal, whose lectures on the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam had stirred a good deal of interest and controversy in the Muslim world<sup>76</sup>. Dr Kraemer in his article discusses this new production of contemporary Muslim apologetics and his conclusions are on the whole unfavourable. Iqbal's views, he sums up, are "more an instance of the world-wide secularization of thinking than a reconstruction of Moslem religious thought"<sup>77</sup>. And with this article the Islamic concerns of the new lecturer at Leiden had to recede into the shadow of more immediate duties.

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74 Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1938, 48 p., henceforth referred to as De Islam als probleem.

75 Hendrik Kraemer, "A Modern Revindication of Islam", in The Moslem World, Vol. 29, No. 2, April 1939, p. 141-150.

76 A.M. Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Lahore, S.M. Ashraf, 1968, 205 p. Iqbal's lectures were given in 1930 at the request of the Madras Muslim Association.

77 Kraemer, "A Modern Revindication of Islam", p. 150.

Holland did not escape the Second World War and had to reorganize its life under enemy occupation. It was not spared the horrors of the Nazi hunt for Jews. Dr Kraemer in a short pamphlet reminded his Church and his compatriots of their duty towards the People of Israel. "The Riddle of History"<sup>78</sup> soon became forbidden literature and could only circulate under the rose. In 1941 Leiden University was finally closed down by the German authorities after its staff and students had struck in protest against the arrest of a Jewish professor. Dr Kraemer, who had stood by his colleagues during that incident, was interned together with other leading churchmen of his country<sup>79</sup>. He was released a year later.

During and after the war, apart from his teaching duties, Dr Kraemer devoted his energies to finding a solution to the many problems of the Church in his country: the division between progressive and orthodox theologians, the

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<sup>78</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "The Riddle of History", Thoughts on Romans IX-XI, in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 32, No. 1, January 1943, p. 78-87.

<sup>79</sup> Franklin Sherman of Mansfield College, Oxford, wrote in his Introduction to Dr Kraemer's The Bible and Social Ethics, Facet Books, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1965, p. vii, that Dr Kraemer "during the war was interned in Buchenwald as a result of his uncompromising resistance to the Nazis." Fortunately he was not. Thus is legend made into history! Dr Kraemer was interned in the buildings of a R.C. Seminary at Sint-Michielsgestel, a small place in North Brabant. (cf. Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 140).

indifference of the laity, the lack of missionary awareness and, generally speaking, the stagnancy of Church life. As he was focussing his attention on such problems, it was soon borne in upon him that the efforts of the Church ought to bear upon two points: a renewal of its missionary zeal and a recognition of the role of the laity in the life of the Church. All his earnestness and urgency passed into a small book he published in 1945, De roeping der Kerk<sup>80</sup>, in which he pleads with his Church for obedience to the voice of its Lord as He speaks through the signs of the times. There came out other publications of Dr Kraemer's during his stay in Holland. Unfortunately those other writings must go begging in these short pages.

4. Director of the Ecumenical Institute  
at Bossey: 1948-1955.

The services rendered by Dr Kraemer to his Church in the Netherlands vouch for the depth of his Christian faith and the truth of his commitment to the mission. To enlarge on them, however, would mean going beyond the compass of our subject. We thus come to the year 1948 which sets another milestone in Dr Kraemer's life. He was then called upon to be the first director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey

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<sup>80</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De roeping der Kerk; ten aanzien van de wereld en van het nederlandsche volk, 's-Gravenhage, D.A. Daamen, 1945, 160 p.

in Switzerland<sup>81</sup>. His new duties, time-consuming though they were, did not altogether prevent him from travelling and lecturing abroad. In 1952 he toured South-East Asia and reported on his visits in The Ecumenical Review<sup>82</sup>. Since the publishing of The Christian Message in 1938, momentous events had taken place in Asia: India had achieved self-government in 1946 and Indonesia in 1949. India had further passed through the throes of partition and the attendant violence which marred the birth of Muslim Pakistan as an independent state in 1947.

Dr Kraemer's continued interest for Islam still shows in the very first words of his report. He writes:

The first country I set foot in was Pakistan, which interested me greatly on account of the particular relation in which I had stood for more than thirty years to the world of Islam.<sup>83</sup>

As we should know now, whatever Dr Kraemer does or writes, his missionary concerns are never far away. His tour in Asia convinced him that ecumenism was one of the best ways of impressing the truth of the Gospel upon the non-Christian world.

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<sup>81</sup> Bossey, i.e. Château de Bossey situated at Céligny, a small village close to Geneva on the railway line to Lausanne.

<sup>82</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "On Tour Through South-East Asia", in The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 1952, p. 117-131. This periodical had started publication in 1948 under the auspices of the World Council of Churches.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

In 1953 another article of his reviewed the situation of "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia". It was written for The International Review of Missions<sup>84</sup>. Now we hear Dr. Kraemer warning the Church in the West/that it "will have to rethink its whole attitude towards the world of Islam"<sup>85</sup>. These words are suggestive of some change in Dr. Kraemer's ideas on the mission to Islam.

It stands to reason that his occupations at Bossey were not of the kind that would stop him from reflecting on missionary problems. Rather they kept his mind fixed on those problems. In 1954 he contributed to the periodical just mentioned a long paper on "Syncretism as a Religious and a Missionary Problem"<sup>86</sup>. What interested Dr. Kraemer above all in syncretism was the phenomenon of synthesis and reinterpretation that takes place whenever two great religious cultures come into contact with each other. We mentioned how this question had already retained his attention in his 1921 study of a sixteenth-century Javanese sample of Muslim mysticism. In The Christian Message syncretism had

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<sup>84</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 42, No. 2, April 1953, p. 144-150.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>86</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Syncretism as a Religious and a Missionary Problem", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 43, No. 3, July 1954, p. 253-273.

also been one of the missionary problems he had tried to warn the delegates about at the Tambaram Conference<sup>87</sup>. And to quote one last example: towards the end of 1937 in his inaugural lecture as Professor of the History of Religions at Leiden he was again prying into the causes of syncretism<sup>88</sup>.

But let us come back to the 1954 article. There Dr Kraemer deals with syncretism both as a phenomenological problem, that is to say one which arises from culture contact, and as a missionary problem, in other words one brought about by the local religious environment's impinging upon the Christian message preached by the missionaries<sup>89</sup>. The author's suggestions how to meet the problems raised by syncretism for the Church in the missions are only tentative. The Church should go at it along three main avenues. Firstly,

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87 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 200-211. About Islamic syncretism Dr Kraemer writes: "In its entirety, however, it (i.e. Islam) has become, like Roman Catholicism in Christendom, a great syncretistic body wherein are welded in one system theocratic and legalistic Islam, mysticism and various sorts of popular religion, in which the naturalistic vein of the primitive apprehension of existence shines through" (p. 215).

88 Hendrik Kraemer, De wortelen van het syncretisme, Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van Hoogleraar in de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid aan de Rijks-Universiteit te Leiden op 3 december 1937, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1937, 28 p.

89 Dr Kraemer's article is well nuanced. He now submits that "the application of the term 'syncretism' to these well-known and well-established religions (i.e. Roman Catholicism and Islam) is more misleading and confusing than elucidating, and it is better to abstain from using this word in reference to them" ("Syncretism as a Religious and a Missionary Problem", p. 261).

it must demonstrate by its being and its life that it really is a community; secondly, in all spiritual nurture of the faithful a central place should be kept for the learning and the habitual use of the Bible; and, finally, every Christian community should be leavened with "a strong minority which knows simply but fundamentally the main tenets of the Christian faith (...), in no way to be regarded as an élite, but as a group that exists on behalf of the whole congregation"<sup>90</sup>.

5. In Active Retirement at Driebergen: 1955-1965.

In the summer of 1955 Dr Kraemer relinquished his functions at the Ecumenical Institute. He would eventually settle down at Driebergen near Utrecht. Although he was now sixty-seven and not in the best of health, retirement did not mean for him that his work for the Church had come to an end. The years that followed would be marked by renewed activity as lecturer both on the continent and overseas. He would also devote more time to reading, thinking and writing. The years 1956 to 1960

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<sup>90</sup> Kraemer, "Syncretism as a Religious and a Missionary Problem", p. 269.

all saw the publication of important works.

If one wonders what Dr Kraemer had been teaching at the Ecumenical Institute, let one read Religion and the Christian Faith for a partial answer<sup>91</sup>. In his preface to that book which came out in 1956, the author explains:

Some of my friends who have read the first draft of this book rightly observed that they somehow got the feeling that it betrayed its partial origin from lectures in the classroom. That is true. Parts I to IV, in a considerably abbreviated form, were given as lectures in the University of Geneva in the winter of 1953/54.<sup>92</sup>

Although the author insists that Religion and the Christian Faith "is as a whole quite new"<sup>93</sup>, one must still read it with The Christian Message in mind. Not only are some of the themes the same: non-Christian religions, natural theology, Barth and Brunner, biblical revelation, relation of Christianity to religions, mysticism and syncretism, but The Christian Message lends the new book one of its most important features: the dialectical approach<sup>94</sup>. In writing Religion

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91 Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, 450 p.

92 Ibid., p. 5. A much shorter writing, The Bible and Social Ethics, also contains material Dr Kraemer used in his lectures at the Ecumenical Institute.

93 Ibid., p. 5.

94 There is, moreover, one chapter entitled "From Jerusalem 1928 to Tambaram 1938", ibid., p. 221-233. Two long notes on The Christian Message were also appended to Chapter 12, ibid., p. 231-233 and to Chapter 18, ibid., p. 316-317.

and the Christian Faith Dr Kraemer sets about clarifying some of the points he had made in The Christian Message and defends with plenty of spirit his general position on Christian revelation. On at least one point he shows a change of mind, namely on the impossibility of finding out where and when God is at work in non-Christian religions<sup>95</sup>. Now Dr Kraemer admits: "I do not any longer maintain the unfeasibility of such attempts"<sup>96</sup>.

Religion and the Christian Faith is quite instructive for an understanding of its author's views on religion<sup>97</sup>, but it brings little that is pertinent to a study of the mission

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<sup>95</sup> In The Christian Message, p. 127, Dr Kraemer wrote: "To indicate systematically and concretely where God revealed Himself and wrestled and wrestles with man in the non-Christian religions is not feasible." One finds the same assertion repeated on p. 428-429.

<sup>96</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 8. In a review article, "A Tambaram Thesis Re-Stated", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 46, No. 2, April 1957, p. 205, W.M. Horton writes of this book: "It is a restatement of his early position, involving a correction at one important point, clarification at other points and vigorous reassertion at still others." Cf. also A.C. Bouquet, The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions, Welwyn, England, James Wisbet, 1958, p. 397-402; W. Andersen, "Dr Kraemer's Contribution to the Understanding of the Nature of Revelation", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 46, No. 4, October 1957, p. 361-371; K. Cragg, "Hearing by the Word of God", ibid., Vol. 46, No. 3, July 1957, p. 241-251; S. Kulandran, "Kraemer Then and Now", ibid., Vol. 46, No. 2, April 1957, p. 171-181.

<sup>97</sup> R.D. Baird in his book Category Formation and the History of Religions, The Hague, Mouton, 1971, p. 107-114, quotes copiously from Dr Kraemer's Religion and the Christian Faith in order to illustrate what he calls the "normative approach of religion".

to Islam.

In 1956 Dr Kraemer treated his reading public to another publication, The Communication of the Christian Faith<sup>98</sup>, a short book based on the five lectures he had delivered at Knox College in Toronto early in the year. It is altogether missionary in character. It is also - which does no harm - a pleasure to read: its simple style and terse treatment are a refreshing change from Dr Kraemer's more ponderous productions. More to the point, however, it is helpful for a complete survey of its author's ideas on Islam since the problem it deals with, namely the communication of the Gospel, affected not only his thinking on the Christian mission in general, but even his views on the mission to the Muslim world.

Two years later, still another book issued from the pen of our author, A Theology of the Laity<sup>99</sup>, which consisted of the Hulsean Lectures he had given at Cambridge some time before. This work, in which the French theologian Yves M.-J. Congar is more often quoted than Karl Barth, displays its

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98 Hendrik Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, 128 p.

99 Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, London, Lutterworth Press, 1958, 192 p. Another publication came out in 1958 under the authorship of Dr Kraemer: From Missionfield to Independent Church. This was mentioned earlier on, p. 35-36.

author's concern for the role of the layman in the Church<sup>100</sup>. There is still observable in it Dr Kraemer's wonted insistence on the missionary character of the Christian Church. But a new trend is coming to light which stresses the nature of the Church not only as mission, but also as ministry and service. This is symptomatic of changed emphases in Dr Kraemer's theological thought and these will be reflected in forthcoming articles on the mission to Islam.

#### World Cultures and World Religions

As A Theology of the Laity went to press in 1958, Dr Kraemer was busy addressing the students of Princeton Theological College in New Jersey, U.S.A. He had been invited to give the Stone Lectures. These provided the groundwork for another of his books, World Cultures and World Religions published in 1960<sup>101</sup>. More than any other of his writings World Cultures shows Dr Kraemer under the spell of history, past, modern and contemporary. The underlying assumption of the book is that a new kind of meeting is

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<sup>100</sup> Dr Kraemer's acquaintance with Congar's works may explain a remark by J. Dejaifve in Nouvelle revue théologique, Vol. 89, No. 3, mars 1967, p. 323: "It is striking how many of the author's views are attuned to the discussions of Vatican II on the same theme" (*On est frappé de la consonance de bien des aperçus de l'auteur avec les discussions de Vatican II sur le même thème*).

<sup>101</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions. The Coming Dialogue, London, Lutterworth Press, 1960, 386 p. Henceforth referred to as World Cultures.

taking place between East and West which offers better opportunities for mutual understanding and entails graver responsibilities for the West and the Church. The idea of an encounter between East and West is not new in Dr Kraemer's writings: it is mentioned in one of his Java reports<sup>102</sup>. What is new is that the East and the West are now meeting as equals and that between equals true dialogue is possible.

In the preface to his book Dr Kraemer writes that his intention is "to provide those who are truly interested in the 'meeting' and 'dialogue' with concrete knowledge of how it grew"<sup>103</sup>. After describing what kind of relations had prevailed in the past between West and East, the author goes into the details of the "cultural response of the East to the Western invasion"<sup>104</sup> and of "the Western response to Eastern cultures and religions"<sup>105</sup>. The Christian missions played an important role in those relations and the redeeming significance of their work is set forth in one of the book's chapters<sup>106</sup>.

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102 Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 28.

103 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 10.

104 Cf. ibid., p. 99-227. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 dwell on that theme.

105 Cf. ibid., p. 228-271.

106 Cf. ibid., Chapter 4, p. 82-98.

Long passages of World Cultures are interesting for a study of Dr Kraemer's views on the historic meetings between Christianity and Islam. For a long time what little knowledge the Christian West held of the East was limited to one region of the Muslim world. The sad fortunes of the first encounter between the two fraternal enemies, as Dr Kraemer calls them, are related in full in World Cultures. An account is also given of the far-reaching consequences of the forced meeting which colonial conquests and politics later imposed upon the House of Islam. What then should be the terms of a dialogue between the two secular opponents?

Unfortunately, if Dr Kraemer tells us what happened in the past between Christianity and the Muslim world, he offers no specific information or suggestion on what should now take place between them. He does outline for his readers the terms of the coming dialogue with other non-Christian religions and cultural systems. As for that religion that interests us most, we have to be content with the author's remark that "the observations are made exclusively with an eye on the Indian and the Far Eastern world of religious cultures, as Islam and Judaism are quite a different case"<sup>107</sup>. Dr Kraemer's explanation is hardly satisfying and the lack of any constructive suggestions about the future relationship of

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107 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 366.

the West and the world of Islam must be accounted a serious shortcoming in this otherwise very interesting book.

What we cannot find in World Cultures and World Religions, we shall to some extent discover in three short compositions which were published in 1960. These all deal with the present situation of Islam and the practical implications of that situation for the mission to the Muslim world. In every one of them Dr Kraemer makes an urgent plea for a revision of the Church's strategy concerning the mission to the countries of the Arabic-speaking world. Owing to the importance of those short writings in a survey of Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam, the following notes will be found helpful.

In 1959 Dr Kraemer lectured on Islam at sessions arranged by CIMADE, a French organization Protestant in origin and ecumenical in outlook whose members are active in international cooperation. These lectures were published in Revue de l'évangélisation as a long article entitled: "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme"<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme", in Revue de l'évangélisation, Vol. 16, No. 87, January-February 1960, p. 2-38. Later on when referring to this article we shall quote only "L'Islam, une religion."

In April 1960 Dr Kraemer was the guest of the Carew Lectures for the Hartford Seminary Foundation. The editor of The Muslim World insisted on offering to the readers of his periodical the lecturer's views on the mission to Islam. These appeared in an article on "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy"<sup>109</sup>.

Finally, that same year, our author wrote for W. Holsten's edition of Neue Begegnung vor Kirche und Islam a twofold essay entitled "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch" and "Die Lage der islamischen Welt und die christliche Kirche"<sup>110</sup>.

The last literary contribution of Dr Kraemer's to our knowledge of Islam is an address he gave in 1961 at a meeting of the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences, Een nieuw

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<sup>109</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", in The Muslim World, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 1960, p. 244-251. This article will be referred to as "Islamic Culture".

<sup>110</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch" and "Die Lage der islamischen Welt und die christliche Kirche", in Neue Begegnung vor Kirche und Islam, ed. by W. Holsten, Stuttgart, Evang. Missionsverlag, 1960, p. 15-27 and 28-36. These two articles, which form a whole, are referred to by the single title of "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" in the course of this study.

geluid op het gebied der Koranexegese<sup>111</sup>. Dr Kraemer was commenting on a book by the Muslim Pakistani writer Daud Rahbar, God of Justice<sup>112</sup>. Rahbar's book, he thought, showed an altogether novel approach to the Koran, both from a theological and from a religious point of view, and was tantamount to a break with the classical apologetics of Islam.

Before his death our author would give his English public one more book, Why Christianity of All Religions?<sup>113</sup>, a translation from a Dutch original published in 1960<sup>114</sup>. Dr Kraemer does not deny that his point of view is "by way of being a confession of faith"<sup>115</sup>. His intention, he writes, is

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111 Hendrik Kraemer, Een nieuw geluid op het gebied der Koranexegese, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe reeks, deel 25, No. 1, Amsterdam, N.V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1962, 28 p. The title is abridged to Een nieuw geluid in our references.

112 D. Rahbar, God of Justice. A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'ān, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960, xxi-446 p. It is the revised edition of the author's dissertation for the Ph.D. at the Cambridge Faculty of Oriental Languages.

113 Hendrik Kraemer, Why Christianity of All Religions?, London, Lutterworth Press, 1962, 125 p. This book will be referred to as Why Christianity?.

114 Hendrik Kraemer, Waarom nu juist het Christendom?, Nijkerk, G.F. Callenbach N.V., 1960, 115 p.

115 Kraemer, Why Christianity?, p. 15.

to set the religions, including Christianity, in the light of the Person of Jesus Christ, who is the Revelation of God and alone has the authority to criticize - I mean, to judge discriminately and with complete understanding - ~~every~~ religion and everything that is in man or proceeds from him.<sup>116</sup>

A few words from one of the last pages of Chapter 5 sums up Dr Kraemer's main point. To the question set as the title of the chapter, "Is Christianity an 'absolute'?", he answers no; and he explains that "the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ is alone absolute, alone unmovable, sure and to be trusted"<sup>117</sup>. We may note that this small book, too, contains interesting references to Islam<sup>118</sup>.

#### Islam in a Christian Perspective

To all appearance in the years before his death in 1965 Dr Kraemer worked hard at a book which he wanted to publish under the title of Islam in a Christian Perspective. This was to be one of the publications he had planned to write on the great non-Christian religions. In his preface to World Cultures and World Religions Dr Kraemer points out, in answer to eventual criticism, that "each of them (i.e. the

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<sup>116</sup> Kraemer, Why Christianity?, p.15. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. ibid., p. 61-62, 104-109 and passim.

great religions) requires a special book"<sup>119</sup>. And he adds: "I have taken care to announce that these special books are on my programme"<sup>120</sup>. In the last chapter of World Cultures he explains how these books should be constructed. They should include four sections, he writes, that is to say:

history and growth of such a religion and culture in clear, compressed outline; a phenomenological survey of the creative mobiles in such a religious cultural whole; a probing of it in the light of the biblical Revelation (theological evaluation); an outline of the ways of communication and of dialogue for defining the central points at issue between Christianity and the described religion.<sup>121</sup>

This agrees to a nicety with the scheme Dr Kraemer proposed to follow in Islam in a Christian Perspective. Part One is entitled "Historical Sketch of Islam. Origin and Development". Part Two bears the simple caption "Phenomenological Part". Part Three was intended to give us a "Theological Evaluation of Islam in a Christian Perspective" and Part Four would have discussed "The Call for and Possibilities of

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<sup>119</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

Communication". But Dr Kraemer left us only Part One and Part Two<sup>122</sup>.

When Dr Kraemer started writing Islam in a Christian Perspective, he had been moved, he says, by the desire

to make a small contribution to a meeting of man with man, of the simple, convinced Christian with the simple convinced Muslim, both animated by the desire to wrestle for Truth and for one another.<sup>123</sup>

He wanted to be guided in his undertaking by "the dialectic of Jesus' attitude in the Gospels and of that contained in Paul's epistles" and wished to "take them as inimitable teachers, encouraging, illuminating and rebuking"<sup>124</sup>. One is tempted to see in this unfinished piece of work many positive instances of the use of that dialectic. Dr Kraemer still has his definite ideas about a number of controverted

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<sup>122</sup> The typescript of Islam in a Christian Perspective, Part One and Part Two, is kept at the Hendrik Kraemer Instituut, Oegstgeest, Holland. Pagination is as follows: Preface, p. 1-9; Part One, p. 10-154; Part Two, p. 155-271. In Part One, Chapter One is numbered p. 10-34 and Chapter Two, p. 16 (sic)-59. Notes and references not included in the body of the text, except for those of Chapter One, fill up 40 sheets. These sheets are set in a sequence which follows the letters of the alphabet. Only Chapter One of Part One, with its references shifted to footnotes, its few corrections and its overlapping pagination, may be regarded as a final draft. The rest of the manuscript is still in process of revision as can be gathered from the notes in the margins, the erasures in the text and the additions built into it by means of narrow slips of paper stuck onto the sheets. The author obviously wanted his work to be up to date: he quotes literature that came out as late as 1961.

<sup>123</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

questions, but he shows unfailing consideration for the diverging opinions of other scholars. He is ever careful that his comments on Islam's official doctrines should neither detract from the sincerity of the Muslim faithful nor put a slur on the professed ideals of their spiritual leaders. Especially tactful is Dr Kraemer's treatment of the role and calling of Muḥammad.

Part Two of the manuscript is the more rewarding for those whose concern is mainly with religious phenomenology. With modesty the author calls this part of his work only an attempt<sup>125</sup> and acknowledges the dangers that beset such a project. Yet he remains convinced that

A non-believer, a non-Muslim can acquire, if he takes the trouble to do so, a more comprehensive knowledge of an alien Religion in its totality of motive-forces and values than most believers get the chance to.<sup>126</sup>

Provided, as he points out, that there is in that non-believer "a symbiosis of knowledge of the facts and ability for intuitive, congenial penetration into the total subject-matter"<sup>127</sup>.

In the last paragraph of Chapter One the author sums up the main ideas that direct the development of this second part of his work. He writes:

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125 Cf. Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 157.

126 Ibid., p. 156.

127 Ibid., p. 157.

In the subsequent chapters it is assumed that the creative "idées mères" which govern the religious apprehension of Islam are its understanding of Allah and of Prophethood, its conception of Revelation and of authority for Truth embodied in Quran and Sunna and its theocratic character.<sup>128</sup>

From what one is given to read in Parts One and Two of Islam in a Christian Perspective, one can only express regret that Dr Kraemer did not live to see the completion of his book through. He died on the 11th November 1965.

On the day Hendrik Kraemer was buried, a friend described him as "a man who obeyed the vision he saw"<sup>129</sup>. There must indeed have been a vision to lead him through a life marked by such unity of purpose and variety of achievement. From what we already know of him, it would be possible to surmise the secret that lies behind his devotion to the Church, his passion for the Christian mission and his fascination with the House of Islam. But this will not be necessary since Dr Kraemer himself told us. At a friendly gathering to mark his seventieth birthday, he referred to the hesitations of his younger years and said: "Still, it was God's pleasure

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<sup>128</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 160.

<sup>129</sup> H.-R. Weber, "Hendrik Kraemer. A man who obeyed the vision he saw", in The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 18, No. 1, January 1966, p. 96-99.

to get hold of me then and make me meet Jesus Christ"<sup>130</sup>.

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No one will contest the credentials of Dr Kraemer as a scholar in the field of Islamic sciences. They pass muster by any standards. From Een javaansche Primbon in 1921 to Islam in a Christian Perspective forty years later his learning is displayed in an array of writings which either look at Islam as a whole or dwell on some of its cultural and religious expressions. For fifteen years, however, namely between 1940 and 1955, Dr Kraemer published very little on Islam. After his intense contacts with the Muslim world during the missionary period of his life, the Church at home and the Ecumenical Movement entrusted him with tasks that called for all his energies.

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<sup>130</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Terugblik", in Uit de nalatenschap van Dr. H. Kraemer, Een bundel opstellen bijeengebracht door B.J. Brouwer, E. Jansen Schoonhoven, S.C. Graaf van Randwijck, Kampen, J.H. Kok, 1970, p. 177: "Toch heeft het God behaagd om mij daar te grijpen, om mij Jezus Christus te laten ontmoeten." For other appreciations of Dr Kraemer's life and work, cf. Th.L. Haitjema, "In memoriam Hendrik Kraemer, 1888-1965", in Kerk en Theologie, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 1966, p. 1-6; W. Horton, "Tambaram Twenty-Five Years After", in Philosophy, Religion and the Coming World Civilization. Essays in honor of William Ernest Hocking, edited by L.S. Rouser, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966, p. 225-234; Stephen Neill, Men of Unity, London, SCM Press, 1960, p. 106-117; E. Jansen Schoonhoven, "Inleiding", in Uit de nalatenschap van Dr. H. Kraemer, p. 7-17; H.-R. Weber, Weltmission heute. Hendrik Kraemer zum Gedächtnis, Berlin, Lettner-Verlag, 1969, 39 p.

When Dr Kraemer leaves Bossey in 1955, his lifelong interest for the Muslim world reasserts itself in World Cultures and World Religions. In fact, from 1956 onwards there is hardly a book of his where Islam is not mentioned in one way or another. Moreover, a few important articles from his pen deal expressly with the mission to Islam. Death finds him half-way through Islam in a Christian Perspective. In this unfinished work one is astonished to notice how much he had succeeded in keeping abreast with contemporary literature on Islam.

Only two of Dr Kraemer's writings were meant to offer a global picture of Islam: Agama Islam and Islam in a Christian Perspective. As the one is in Malay and the other remains unpublished both are difficult of access to missionaries at large. The paradoxical character of this situation should not distract our attention from the important fact that those two compositions owe their origin to the missionary concerns of their author. Both were conceived as means of helping Christians in their approach to the Muslim religion. To put it differently, both are missionary writings. This comes as no surprise in a man who openly confessed his passion

for the Christian mission<sup>131</sup>.

For one must remember that Dr Kraemer's sympathy for Islam, although it is coupled with genuine scientific interest, is grounded in and borne by the Christian conviction that the truth of revelation must be taken to all peoples. In point of fact, Dr Kraemer never thought of any other reason for his university education than that of his future work for the missions. From the very first moment Islam took hold of him because of the mystery and challenge it presented to Christianity.

One finds in his writings enough material to warrant a systematic ordering of his views on the mission to Islam. Still one must agree that such sections of his works as deal with the mission to Islam loom small compared to what he wrote on the Church, the Christian faith and even the Christian mission in general. This observation only bears out our contention that Dr Kraemer was first and foremost a missionary. He never forgot that the House of Islam was but one part of that vast non-Christian world to which the Good News of Jesus Christ must also be brought.

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. Kraemer, "Terugblik", p. 179. Dr Kraemer writes: "I dare to say without hesitation that the mission, from the moment I got in touch with it until the present day, has been the dominating passion of my life". (Ik durf gerust te zeggen, dat de zending, vanaf het ogenblik dat ik er mee in aanraking gekomen ben tot op de huidige dag, de alles beheersende passie in mijn leven is geweest.)

These remarks bring us to the conclusion that a study of Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam may not be conducted without first referring to his teaching on the Christian mission as a whole. The Christian mission is the natural setting where the mission to Islam finds both its place and its meaning. Before focussing our attention on the Church's duty towards the Muslim world, we must first ask Dr Kraemer what he thinks of the Christian mission, how it is connected with the Church, how its objectives must be understood, in what light it should consider the non-Christian religions and what part the missionary must play in its undertakings. The answers to these questions will provide us with the essential elements of Dr Kraemer's teaching on the Christian mission.

## CHAPTER II

### A VISION OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

The unity both in thought and in action that shows through Dr Kraemer's life, whether in the East Indies as adviser to the Bible Society, in Holland during the war years of 1939 to 1945, or in Switzerland as the first Director of the Ecumenical Institute, finds an obvious explanation in his conviction that the Christian faith carries with it a permanent obligation to witness to the saving acts of God through Jesus Christ. No cultural, social or religious province lies beyond the pale of that obligation either in the world of the non-Christian religions or in the world of secularity marked by the ongoing process of dechristianization. Still, whatever interest Dr Kraemer may have had for all expressions of the religious phenomenon in man, one in particular retained his unflinching attention: that of Islam.

Although it is our purpose to find out and correlate Dr Kraemer's views on Islam as he saw it from the standpoint of the Christian mission, we must first consider his thought on that mission. It would be difficult, not to say impossible, to appreciate how he envisaged the mission to Islam without first knowing his ideas about the Christian mission itself.

One important point should be kept in mind before we proceed with our inquiry. When trying to understand what

Dr Kraemer had to say about the mission, one must not lose sight of the Christian tradition to which he belonged.

Dr Kraemer was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and was sincerely devoted to it. In what will be said about his theory of the mission, one will detect emphases that link his views to the theological tradition of Calvin. Let us mention in particular his voluntaristic notion of the Godhead, his insistence on the Bible as the only source of revelation, his conviction that only through faith can a true knowledge of God ever be obtained, and his deep-seated mistrust of man as a rebel in front of his Creator. Moreover, Dr Kraemer felt attracted to the theologies of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in their dialectical concept of revelation. In vocabulary is any indication of a man's ideological dependence, the use of the word 'crisis', so frequent for instance in The Christian Message<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p. We shall be quoting from the 1969 printing of the third edition by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, identical in contents and arrangement with the Edinburgh House Press edition. For the theological influences that have led to Dr Kraemer's theory of mission as set forth in The Christian Message, thus quoted in future references, cf. C.F. Hallencreutz, Kraemer Towards Tambaram. A Study in Hendrik Kraemer's Missionary Approach, Studia Missionalia VII, Lund, Gleerup, 1966, 340 p. Concerning the Tambaram Conference for whose delegates The Christian Message was written, cf. J.J.E. van Lin, Protestantse theologie der godsdiensten: van Edinburgh naar Tambaram (1910-1938), Assen, Van Gorcum, 1974, p. 273-366, and S. Knak, "Das religiöse Leben der Gegenwart und die christliche Verkündigung", in Das Wunder der Kirche unter den Völkern der Erde, Bericht über die Weltmissions-Konferenz in Tambaram (Südindien) 1938, Herausgegeben von Martin Schlunk, Berlin, Heimatdienstverlag, 1939, p. 72-89.

shows that Dr Kraemer's perception of faith and revelation owes not a little to the so-called theology of crisis.

In these pages dealing with Dr Kraemer's theory of mission as a prelude to a more specific study of his teaching about Islam, we shall first look into the related concepts of Church and mission. A second part will explain in what the objectives of the missionary consist. The third section will be devoted to a consideration of revelation as Dr Kraemer sees it in its relation to the non-Christian religions. Finally, we shall describe in the last paragraphs of our study how he perceives the missionary's pastoral role in the work of evangelism<sup>2</sup>.

In this short survey it is impossible to render complete justice to Dr Kraemer's elaborate writings on the mission since we will take into account only such of his

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<sup>2</sup> It would be a blunder to study Dr Kraemer's views on the Christian mission, even in a short essay, without first referring them to a well-defined time setting. During Dr Kraemer's lifetime that sector of the Christian mission that goes by the name of missions underwent considerable changes owing to the passing of the colonial era, and one has every right to presume that our author's views were affected by that juncture in history. Roughly speaking we refer in these pages to such writings of Dr Kraemer's as came out before the watershed of colonialism, namely the independence of India in 1947. We have, however, made use of Religion and the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, 461 p., when dealing with two themes of Dr Kraemer's teaching on the mission, those of syncretism and of revelation. Religion and the Christian Faith helps to understand and completes what the author wrote in The Christian Message. On the other hand, the treatment of those themes, which are not intrinsically linked to historical conditions, need not take into account eventual changes in Dr Kraemer's ideas about the missions.

views as throw light on his understanding of the mission to Islam. The themes discussed in the following sections will provide a broad frame in which to situate Dr Kraemer's thought on Islam as a missionary problem<sup>3</sup>.

### 1. The Church and the Mission.

The many publications of Dr Kraemer from De strijd over Bali en de Zending<sup>4</sup> in 1933 to A Theology of the Laity<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a clear and comprehensive study of Dr Kraemer's theory of mission cf. G.W. Conway, An Exposition and Critical Analysis of the Theology of the Missions as Proposed by Dr. Hendrik Kraemer, a Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of Theology, Pontifical (sic) Gregorian University for the Degree of Doctor, Sacred Theology, Winona, Minnesota, 1965, 102 p. This publication includes only the first of the three parts of Conway's thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De strijd over Bali en de Zending. Een studie en een appèl, Amsterdam, H.J. Paris, 1933, 141 p.

<sup>5</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, London, Lutterworth Press, 1958, 192 p. Dr Kraemer was deeply concerned about the role of the laity in the Church and his Theology of the Laity is the result of a long reflexion which mostly expressed itself in Dutch publications. It is overdoing things a bit to call him "the classic exponent of Protestant theology of the laity" (le classique de la 'laïcologie' protestante) and to speak of "Kraemer's school" in this area of theology, as J. Grootaers did in his essay on "La fonction théologique du laïc dans l'Eglise", in Théologie. Le service théologique dans l'Eglise. Mélanges offerts à Yves Congar pour ses soixante-dix ans par G. Philips et autres, Coll. Cogitatio fidei, 76, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1974, p. 83-112. It is true, nevertheless, that Dr Kraemer was in the Reformed Church the most outspoken advocate of "the frozen credits of the Church", as he called the lay people, during the early forties in Holland, at the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954, and even after the publication of A Theology of the Laity in articles such as "De wereldomvattende laity-discussie en haar oorzaken", in Wending, Vol. 16, No. 10, December 1961, p. 541-551.

twenty-five years later, however varied in content and purpose, find their common inspiration in his passion for the mission of the Church.

It was during his stay in Java, first from 1922 to 1928 and then from 1930 to 1935, that Dr Kraemer, having to face the many problems encountered by the missionary organizations and their young Christian communities, came to reflect on the continuity that links Church and mission. This is not mere surmise; we have his own words for it. In his 1958 Preface to From Missionfield to Independent Church<sup>6</sup> he wrote that the reports contained in that book

had at the same time a theoretical and a practical purpose. They are based on intensive preparatory study and a not less intensive endeavour of field-research. It led me to fundamental theological thinking into the meaning of the Church and of Missions (...)<sup>7</sup>

#### A. The Church in History.

When Dr Kraemer speaks of the nature of the Church he uses the same phrase to convey a twofold connotation: on

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<sup>6</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, From Missionfield to Independent Church, London, SCM Press, 1958, 186 p. Future references to this book will mention only From Missionfield. It contains reports written by Dr Kraemer during his missionary years in Java.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 9. The best study of Dr Kraemer's idea of the Church is to be found in H.J. Margull, Theologie der missionarischen Verkündigung. Evangelisation als oekumenisches Problem, Stuttgart, Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1959, p. 127-162 and passim. The author's survey includes the views of other theologians of the mission as well. His book shows how much influence Dr Kraemer's thought exerted on the course of missionary theology, at least within the Reformed and Lutheran Churches.

the one hand, there is the community originating in Christ, the ideal model, as it were, proposed in the New Testament, and, on the other hand, the various forms this ideal community has assumed in the course of history.

Regarding what he calls the "idea" or "essential reality" of the Church, Dr Kraemer writes in a 1936 publication, Kerk en Zending<sup>8</sup>, that this idea is well rendered by the Pauline expression "the body of Christ". This means, he explains,

that the Church is the community of those who are linked together in common belief in, common love for and common adoration of Him who is the Head and the Life of that community.<sup>9</sup>

Dr Kraemer uses practically the same terms in The Christian Message where he defines the Church as an "ecclesia". He describes it as

the community and fellowship of those who are united in common faith, common love and common worship of Him who is their Life and Head, bound in loyalty towards Him, permeated, inspired and chastened by His Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Kerk en Zending, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum, 1936, 40 p.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 11: "Naar haar idee en wezenlijke werkelijkheid is de Kerk, naar een Paulinische zegswijze, het lichaam van Christus. Wat wil dat zeggen? Dit, dat de Kerk de gemeenschap dergenen is, die saamgebonden zijn in gemeenschappelijk geloof in, gemeenschappelijke liefde tot, en gemeenschappelijke aanbidding van Hem, die het Hoofd en het Leven dezer gemeenschap is." Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>10</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 416.

"The body of Christ", "the ecclesia", "the community of all those who believe in the same Lord", these terms and expressions convey the idea of the Church as reflected in the New Testament. But the Church never was a mere idea. It is a living institution that has in the course of history assumed various forms. From observations made here and there in From Missionfield to Independent Church, it appears that Dr Kraemer shows a certain indifference to the "form and system of its organization"<sup>11</sup>. As he sees it, there are many "visible forms of the one holy catholic Christian Church"<sup>12</sup>. This variety finds a justification in the diversity already shown in the New Testament. To illustrate this Dr Kraemer notes that

Rome sees the solution in a linking up with and subordination to the cathedra of Peter; Ignatius found it in the episcopal order; Calvin raised the Biblical-apostolic institutions to generally valid principles.<sup>13</sup>

11 Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 33.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 92. Later Dr Kraemer, influenced by the ecumenical movement, took a deeper view of the plurality of Churches. In De roeping der Kerk, 's-Gravenhage, D.A. Daamen, 1945, p. 107, reflecting upon the division that lies at the root of this variety of historical forms, he sees in this splitting (deze gespletenheid) a mystery and a sin (een raadsel en een zonde). He is also conscious of the claims of truth and writes, p. 110, that "the highest and finally only objective for the Churches is and must be the question of truth, that is to say the truth in love and love in the truth" (het hoogste en uiteindelijk-eeuige doelwit voor Kerken de waarheidsvraag is en moet zijn, d.w.z. de waarheid in de liefde en de liefde in de waarheid). Dr Kraemer's italics. On how he views the relation of the Churches to the Universal Church, cf. his article "De werkelijkheid en onwerkelijkheid der Universele Kerk", in De Kerk in beweging, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1947, p. 40-51.

But he is careful to add that not all Church forms have "equal value in their approximation of the spirit of the Gospel"<sup>14</sup>.

It is significant that when Dr Kraemer wrote this he was precisely dealing with problems of organization for an independent Church in Java<sup>15</sup>. Historical developments all point to a fundamental dimension of the Church: its empirical character. Dr Kraemer insists on this in both Kerk en Zending and The Christian Message, using at times the very same phraseology. The Church is called to an ideal life in Christ, but it has to live in this world. For this reason Dr Kraemer does not hesitate to call it "a contradictory phenomenon" since, as he explains,

she is heavenly and earthly at the same time.  
By her origin and aim she is not from this world.  
By her activity and being, however, she is as much  
of this world as whatever institution in the world.<sup>16</sup>

"Heavenly from the heavens and earthly from the earth"<sup>17</sup>, the Church does not live in a vacuum, but at a definite place and

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<sup>14</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Cf: ibid., p. 92-93, the section entitled "Preamble to a Draft Church Constitution for an Independent Church of East Java."

<sup>16</sup> Kraemer, Kerk en Zending, p. 10: "De Kerk is een tegenstrijdige verschijning, omdat zij hemelsch en aardsch tegelijk is. Naar oorsprong en doel is zij niet van deze wereld. Naar haar werking en zijn is zij echter in even sterke mate van deze wereld als welke instelling ter wereld ook."

<sup>17</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 419.

time in history, and owing to the limitations and sinfulness of its members it is submitted to enduring tensions between the ideal of its essential nature and the failures of its empirical existence. In other words, the Church can be said to be in a permanent state of crisis. Indeed, crisis is the normal condition of the Church. Dr Kraemer goes even further when he writes:

Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it. The Church ought always to be aware of its condition of crisis on account of the abiding tension between its essential nature and its empirical condition.<sup>18</sup>

This essential nature, mentioned by Dr Kraemer, is defined by a number of characteristics the neglect or absence of which may lead to deeper crisis in the Church. For instance, the Church is a community of people linked together by the bonds of common belief, love and adoration; when the Church does not strive without cease to achieve this through renewed conversion, a crisis arises in the Church. Moreover, the Church is an eschatological community bound together in the expectation of the Kingdom of God; when this community forgets that "it is essentially an interim-institution living and working in this world between the time"<sup>19</sup>, the Church

<sup>18</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 418. Cf. also p. 25. Dr Kraemer likes to speak of the Church as living between the times. In fact, eschatology is important in his understanding of the mission. Margull in his Theologie der missionarischen Verkündigung, p. 22, speaks of Dr Kraemer's "expectant evangelism". J. Brisbois studies this question in his doctoral dissertation

eventually finds itself in the midst of a crisis. When the Church loses sight of its apostolic mandate to witness to Jesus Christ, then again the Church falls into a critical posture.

B. The Church and the Mission.

This last observation brings up an ever-recurring theme in Dr Kraemer's thinking on the Church. When the Church forgets or ignores its apostolic mandate, it is not true to its nature. The Church is essentially an apostolic body, not because it is somehow connected with the Apostles but, as our author points out,

because in all its words and actions it ought to be a bearer of witness to God and His decisive creative and redeeming acts and purposes. To become conscious of its apostolic character is for the Church the surest way to take hold of its real essence and substance.<sup>20</sup>

The duty laid on the Church with a view to this apostolic witness is called the mission, a notion which includes both the internal and external mission. In Kerk en Zending Dr Kraemer stresses that when using the word mission he wishes to convey

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19 (cont'd) Apostolat, religion, eschatologie dans la théologie de la mission selon H. Kraemer, J.C. Hoekendijk, A.T. van Leeuwen, Institut catholique de Paris, 1972, xliv-379.p.

20 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 2. On the use of the word 'apostolic' or 'apostolate' by the Dutch theologians of the mission, including Dr Kraemer, cf. M. Spindler, La mission combat pour le salut du monde, Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1967, p. 19-20.

that complex of preaching and activity which in practice bears the name of interior (home) and exterior (foreign) mission. They are two aspects of one and the same thing: the obligation of the Church or Christianity both in their environment and in the non-Christian world to maintain an apostolic attitude.<sup>21</sup>

To underline the importance of this last point, Dr Kraemer goes as far as saying that "the nature of the Church is Mission"<sup>22</sup>. He sees between Church and mission an essential connexion that almost amounts to synonymy. His intense conviction in this matter prompts him in The Christian Message to plead with the Church to take its witnessing duty in all earnestness and also to take God's

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21 Kraemer, Kerk en Zending, p. 7: "Wij willen er steeds mee aanduiden dat complex van verkondiging en werkzaamheid, dat in de praktijk den naam draagt van Inwendige en Uitwendige Zending. Ze zijn twee aspecten van één zaak, n.l. de verplichting der Kerk of der Christenheid om in eigen omgeving en in de niet-Christelijke wereld in de apostolische houding te staan."

22 Ibid., p. 24: "Kerk-zijn is Zending-zijn; Zending-zijn is Kerk-zijn". I.P.C. van 't Hof in Het Zendingbegrip van Karl Barth, Uitgegeven vanwege den Zendingstudie-raad, Oegstgeest, Drukkerij van de Stichting Hoenderloo, 1946, p. 67-85, has compared Dr Kraemer's concept of the mission with that of Karl Barth: for Barth the mission belongs to the ministry of the Church. J.H. Bavinck in Introduction to the Science of Missions, Philadelphia, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1960, p. 68-69 discusses Dr Kraemer's views of the mission and sees in it one of the three activities of the Church. See also Spindler's observations in La mission combat pour le salut du monde, p. 108. From later writings it is clear that Dr Kraemer held his ground and never changed his mind on the essential connexion between Church and mission. In A Theology of the Laity in 1958, p. 131-132, he still maintains that "a more adequate way of expressing this (i.e. apostolic) aspect is: the Church is Mission" (his own italics). Note that Bavinck's book had first appeared in Dutch in 1954.

"decisive creative and redeeming acts and purposes"<sup>23</sup> with all the realism which is the keynote of the biblical narratives or, to use his favourite expression, in a spirit of "biblical realism".

In the same work our author expresses in a vivid manner what the attitude of the Church should be if it wished to be faithful to its mandate and fulfil it in the spirit conveyed by the Bible. He writes:

To sum up, from the standpoint of Biblical realism the attitude towards the non-Christian religions, and likewise the relation of the Christian Church to the world in all its domains, is the combination of a prophetic, apostolic heraldship of truth for Christ's sake with a priestly apostolic ambassadorship of love for His sake. The right attitude of the Church, properly understood, is essentially a missionary one, the Church being set by God in the world as ambassador of His reconciliation, which is the truth that outshines all truth and the grace that works faithful love.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 2. The Kraemerian Church is essentially a witnessing community. On this view of the Church, logically connected with Barth's dialectical theology of revelation, cf. J. Aagaard, "Revelation and Religion", in Studia Theologica, Vol. 14, Fasc. 2, 1960, p. 148-185 and especially p. 173-176.

24 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 129-130. Dr Kraemer uses the expression 'biblical realism' throughout his book. That simple phrase has brought its author a good deal of criticism, both fair and unfair. In the Preface to the 2nd edition of his book in 1946 he wrote: "My standpoint has nothing to do with literalism and fundamentalism. I started and still do start from the evident fact that the Bible is the record of God's acts of revelation in history and that the Christian Church can only live by sedulously dealing with the Bible as such". Ten years later, in Religion and the

A necessary connexion exists between the Church's attitude towards the non-Christian peoples and the kind of relation it maintains with the world in which it lives. So much so, Dr Kraemer insists, that a missionary disposition becomes "a life-interest of the first rank for the Church"<sup>25</sup>. And he explains that "a Church which is not really alive to that is also largely ineffective and oblivious of its obligation in its own environment"<sup>26</sup>. And it is to be deplored that the missionary cause remains the concern of only a minority in the Church. Accordingly, missionaries are rendering the Church a service of paramount importance when their appeal, instead of being centred on financial support, is founded, as Dr Kraemer puts it, "on the persistent reminder

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24 (cont'd) Christian Faith, p. 232, he admits that he "did not make sufficiently clear the implications of the term 'Biblical realism'". In that publication he prefers to speak of "Biblical thinking" (p. 238), "Biblical apprehension of God" (p. 292), "Biblical élan vital" (p. 313), "the world of spiritual reality as recorded in the Bible" (p. 315), etc. In The Communication of the Christian Faith, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1956, 128 p., the phrase appears on p. 23. For a critical appraisal of the theological implications of Dr Kraemer's 'biblical realism', cf. Th. L. Haitjema, "Academische theologie en bijbelsch realisme", in Onder eigen vaandel, Vol. 16, No. 4, October 1941, p. 255-267 and E.C. Dewick, The Gospel and Other Faiths, London, The Canterbury Press, 1948, p. 111-116. Hallencreutz in Kraemer Towards Tambaram, p. 289-293, provides an interesting background to Dr Kraemer's 'biblical realism'.

25 Ibid., p. 41.

26 Ibid., p. 42.

of the membership of the Church that it is invited to partake in the objective, God-given commission and mission of the Church<sup>27</sup>.

## 2. The Missions and the New Christian Communities.

When Dr Kraemer speaks of the mission of the Church he gives that phrase a comprehensive meaning which includes the missionary enterprise, or the missions, as we call them. The missions are but one of the ways in which the Church carries out its God-given mandate of witnessing to Jesus Christ in the world.

Dr Kraemer is a missionaries' missionary and much of what he told his Church at home and the missionaries at large will never lose its value. What he thinks of the missions and missionary work is mostly to be found in The Christian Message. Some of the questions he touches upon in that book are relevant here. Not only are they important in themselves because of their practical character, but they also reveal trends in Dr Kraemer's missionary thought that are of great help when trying to understand his views on Islam.

The first point that readily comes to mind concerns the aim of missions. The twofold character of this aim is clearly stated by our author according to whom the aim of all

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27 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 43.

missionary work must be

the clear and persevering witness in words and acts to Christian truth and life and the building up of living Christian communities, trustfully leaving to God what He will do with the work of His servants.<sup>28</sup>

In this short statement Dr Kraemer has managed to express the nature of missionary work in a manner that no Christian missionary, to whatever confession he may belong, need take exception to. We note first of all that the purpose of the missions is twofold. Besides witnessing to Christian truth the mission aims at building up Christian communities. The distinction is necessary because, as it often turns out, it is not all missionary work that succeeds in founding new Churches. Dr Kraemer's own experience with certain Muslim collectivities in the East Indies had made him well aware of that fact<sup>29</sup>.

A. Witnessing to Jesus Christ.

The outstanding element and the starting-point of missionary work are the witness to Christian truth. Dr Kraemer insists that this witness must be clear beyond all doubt. There should be no confusion left in the minds of those who

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<sup>28</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 287.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. in particular Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 55-61 and p. 102-116.

come into contact with the missionary: somehow they should become aware of the missionary's connexion with Christ. Although missionary work is not merely confined to preaching, its other activities, for instance those of a charitable nature, must also carry the stamp of testimony to Jesus Christ.

On this last point Dr Kraemer will brook no evasion or ambiguity. Referring to the many occupations of missionaries in the missionfield, he insists that

all activities of the Christian Church and of missions in social service, in education, in rural reconstruction, in medical work and so many things more only get their right missionary foundation and perspective if they belong as intrinsically to the category of witness as preaching or evangelization.<sup>30</sup>

These activities then, because of their witnessing character, are likewise directed towards achieving the second objective of missions: the building up of Christian communities. However, between the clear call of the missionary and the emergence of new Churches something has happened to change the hearts of a few or of a great many people. The witness is but the beginning of the operation and the Christian community is its end-product. Meantime there has occurred the mystery of conversion.

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<sup>30</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 433.

Proselytism and conversion

Is it right to preach in order to convince people of the truth of Jesus Christ and to invite them to accept it? In other words, may the missionary work for their conversion? On the subject of conversion Dr Kraemer has some definite ideas well worth a moment's consideration. He notes that proselytism has become a bad word. Should we eschew the use of it? Should we even forgo trying to introduce people to Jesus Christ and rather insist only on service and ministry<sup>31</sup>?

Dr Kraemer does not worry much over the sectarian overtones of the word proselytism. "The bad repute in which the word stands, he says, should not make us hesitant in using it with all frankness"<sup>32</sup>. For if we use it, it is because it agrees with the deeper reality of a missionary's life, indeed with Christian life itself as Dr Kraemer points out in the following observation:

It is no mistaken form of proselytism, but it belongs to the very essence of obedience to God, that a Christian and a missionary should live by the ardent desire that all men will surrender to Christ as the Lord of their lives.<sup>33</sup>

Our author admits however that the Christian missions have often in the past shown an aggressive and objectionable

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31 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 431-433.

32 Ibid., p. 432.

33 Ibid.

attitude in their dealings with the non-Christian religions. The approach may have been wrong, but the intention was right since conversion, which implies a decision for Christ and a break with one's religious past<sup>34</sup>, does belong to the essence of the Christian mission.

The call to conversion that the missionary directs to non-Christians - a call that the missionary himself must not evade - should not be misunderstood. It is not the offering of a revelation that the missionary enjoys as personal achievement or owns as personal property. Accordingly his attitude should be one of radical humility, not of superior complacency, and his appeal, to use Dr Kraemer's words,

means gratefully and persuasively to entreat men to surrender to God's revelation in Christ, which is not our religious achievement or possession, but God's free gift.<sup>35</sup>

Missionary zeal springs from an obligation to preach and therefore affords no cause for self-gratification. It is justified by the missionary's conviction that "Jesus Christ is the sole legitimate Lord of all human lives and that the

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34 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 291: "To decide for Christ and the world He stands for implies a break with one's religious past, whether this past is 'Christian' in the qualified sense of the word or non-Christian." Dr Kraemer's italics.

35 Ibid., p. 301. Cf. p. 119: "The real Christian contention is not: 'We have the revelation and not you', but pointing gratefully and humbly to Christ: 'It has pleased God to reveal Himself fully and decisively in Christ; repent, believe and adore'."

failure to recognize this is the deepest religious error of mankind<sup>36</sup>.

To sum up: no new Christian communities could arise without the missionary's call to conversion and in this the missionary is urged by a sense of obligation to preach the truth of Jesus Christ. But with these last words, namely the truth of Jesus Christ, one comes up against the central problem of the whole missionary endeavour: the question of truth. The missionary could not carry out his obligation if he were not convinced that truth was revealed in Jesus Christ.

#### Truth and Christianity

It is no wonder then that the question of truth is also one of the main preoccupations of Dr Kraemer's. In The Christian Message the question of truth assumes paramount importance<sup>37</sup>. In 1928 already, at the World Missionary Conference of Jerusalem, Dr Kraemer had shown impatience with the discussions centring on the values of other religions.

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<sup>36</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 433. In his later work, Religion and the Christian Faith, Dr Kraemer expresses the same views. He writes on p. 30: "It is this missionary vocation of the Church which leads her constantly into the position to give a reasonable account of her stupendous and seemingly bigoted claim that there is no salvation in any other than in Christ."

<sup>37</sup> In later publications Dr Kraemer would again come back to the question of truth, especially in Religion and the Christian Faith and in Why Christianity of all Religions?, London, Lutterworth Press, 1962, 125 p.

He had asked then, "What is the value of values?"<sup>38</sup> and had reminded the delegates that the standard of reference was not values, but truth.

Although Dr Kraemer speaks of "Christian truth"<sup>39</sup> or of the "truth of Christianity"<sup>40</sup>, he will not have truth equated with historical Christianity nor will he countenance "the rash and erroneous identification of empirical Christianity with the revelation in Christ"<sup>41</sup>. He disapproves of those fundamentalist missionaries who "identify their peculiar doctrinal and intellectualist expression of Christianity with the Christian revelation as contained in Biblical realism"<sup>42</sup>.

It is allowable at this stage to digress for a moment. After the words just quoted Dr Kraemer goes on to speak of "the dynamic and supradoctrinal character of the prophetic religion of Biblical realism"<sup>43</sup>. The words 'supradoctrinal

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<sup>38</sup> In Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 221, Dr Kraemer relates the incident in an impersonal way. It was he, however, who raised the question at the Jerusalem Conference as A. Th. van Leeuwen tells us in Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk, Amsterdam, W. ten Have N.V., 1959, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 344.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 383. The phrase "the Christian revelation as contained in Biblical realism" is a very ungainly one.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

character' raise a question that one ought not to ignore. Was not the slogan "Back to fundamentals"<sup>44</sup> or the phrase "biblical realism" with its admittedly supradoctrinal character a convenient detour to bypass the tricky problem of deciding between the conflicting claims of various Christian Churches to being each of them the true Church of Christ? As can be gathered from the reports in From Mission-field to Independent Church and from various passages in The Christian Message, Dr Kraemer was well aware of the confusion engendered in the minds of native converts and non-Christians in general by the variety of Christian organizations seeking their adhesion in the name of truth<sup>45</sup>.

It would be unjust to suspect Dr Kraemer of stooping to such expedients. He holds fast to the principle that empirical Christianity is not to be identified with the revelation in Christ and therefore "empirical Christianity is just as much an example of religion in general as the other religions are"<sup>46</sup>. What matters in the case of the various

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<sup>44</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> In De roeping der Kerk, p. 38, Dr Kraemer appeals again to a supradoctrinal principle, that of obedience to Jesus Christ the Lord of the Church, in order to bring contending factions within the Dutch Reformed Church and the other Calvinist Churches in Holland to work together towards the renewal of the Christian community.

<sup>46</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 145.

Christian Churches is not then the question which is the true Church but how the Church can become a true Church in faithful fulfilment of its obligations<sup>47</sup>. The Church, too, stands under the judgment of the revelation in Christ. This view makes it easy to understand why Dr Kraemer can at times be quite vehement in his strictures upon the Christian Churches, no matter whether it is the Protestant Church in the East Indies<sup>48</sup>, the Dutch Reformed Church at home<sup>49</sup>, or the (Roman) Catholic Church in general.

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<sup>47</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 419. The question of truth further arises about the various creeds of the Churches and becomes crucial for ecumenical unity. Dr Kraemer acknowledged this in De roeping der Kerk, p. 110 where he wrote: "the highest and finally only objective for the Churches is and must be the question of truth" (het hoogste en uiteindelijk-ee-nige doelwit voor Kerken de waarheidsvraag is en moet zijn...). Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>48</sup> Dr Van Leeuwen reports in From Missionfield, p. 13, that a few local Christian communities in the Dutch East Indies had been under the care of the Netherlands Missionary Union until about 1880 when they merged with the Protestant Church, which "was not only a Church without missions, but, and this was even worse, a Church without a creed." It was this situation that Dr Kraemer had been called upon to investigate during his 1926 visit to the Minahasa on the tip of Celebes Island. In his report he wrote: "The Protestant Church in the Indies is not a Church. Its only ecclesiastical feature is that it is called a Church". Ibid., p. 34. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>49</sup> In De roeping der Kerk, p. 17, Dr Kraemer wrote that his Church - the great Church - offered (before 1940) the "sorry spectacle of drawn-out existence, not of living, of responsibilities shunned, not assumed" (Voort-existereeren, niet leven; verantwoordelijkheeden ontgaan, niet op zich nemen, was het droevige schouwspel, dat zij bood). That little book offers some of the most forthright language we have ever come across in respect of one's own Church.

According to Dr Kraemer, the truth that is the motive power of the missionary's activity is not a set of doctrinal tenets. It is the revelation of God's redeeming acts embodied in Jesus Christ, who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Witnessing to this Truth is a necessity laid upon the missionary, a mandate to be carried out, the authenticity or relevancy of which is not to be assessed by the success it achieves. The missionary's perseverance then is not conditioned by performance, achievement or realization. It is rooted in a willingness to be God's obedient servant, thus "trustfully leaving to God what He will do with the work of His servants"<sup>50</sup>.

B. Building new Christian communities.

The success most earnestly sought after by the missionary is no doubt the building up of living Christian communities since the Christian faith, beyond one's personal commitment to Christ, implies belonging to the community of those who believe in the same Lord. The Christian faith not only brings about individual conversion and a new relationship with God, it also secures entry into God's family and therefore creates new links not without social implications.

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<sup>50</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 287.

The social consequences of the missionary's work are given their full importance in Dr Kraemer's missionary theory, all the more so as the cultures of the non-Christian world are viewed by him as totalitarian complexes where the word "religious", as he says, "has primarily a social connotation"<sup>51</sup>.

A study of Dr Kraemer's ideas on the new Christian communities is particularly rewarding. His reflexion is based on first-hand acquaintance with the problems of Christian congregations going through the pains of growth within an environment deeply influenced by traditional religions or by Islam. When Dr Kraemer wrote The Christian Message in a non-Christian World he could draw upon an experience that went far beyond the few reports reproduced in From Missionfield to Independent Church.

Generally speaking, the young Christian communities should aim at becoming Churches in the full sense of the word. In the particular conditions in which these new communities find themselves, this implies a maturing process tending towards authentic Christian life, careful indigenization and adequate autonomy. These three goals provide the main themes of Dr Kraemer's reflexion on the young Churches. We will now consider each of these in turn.

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<sup>51</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 287.

Alluding to some missionaries' overriding preoccupations with indigenization, Dr Kraemer observes that before finding out the meaning of an indigenous Church it is far more important to know first what one means by a Church. If one's primary concern is about the indigenization of the Church, he writes, one may take "the nature and the function of the Church too easily for granted"<sup>52</sup>.

What we have already reported of Dr Kraemer's understanding of the Church in the first section of these pages on the Christian mission is relevant here. It applies with equal force, although in different circumstances, to the new Church. These different circumstances, however, cause Dr Kraemer to sound a few notes of warning.

He feels it necessary to point out that the Church cannot be conceived as "a society of the morally and religiously perfect which boast of divine election"<sup>53</sup>. He remarks that the terms used in the New Testament, such as "saints", "royal priesthood" and "consecrated nation", are directed "towards men and women of common clay, who are constantly reminded that they are to strive to purify themselves from great sins and very bad habits"<sup>54</sup>. These words are a reminder

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52 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 415.

53 Ibid., p. 416. Dr Kraemer's italics.

54 Ibid., p. 416-417.

that missionaries should not be too easily put out by the lapses and setbacks that go together with Christian community-building in a non-Christian environment.

Dr Kraemer understands how strong and rigid the social structure of traditional communities usually is. The Church, too, brings about a new fellowship; but, Dr Kraemer warns, "this fellowship transcends all mundane relations by its loyalty to its Head and Lord"<sup>55</sup>. In an early section of The Christian Message he had stated the same principle, although in different terms, by insisting that "modern missions do not aim at planting Christianity by identifying religion and community"<sup>56</sup>. Of course a Church is bound to live within a given community, but it should always remain "distinct from it by its inward autonomy"<sup>57</sup> since it is primarily guided by obedience to God's will.

#### The threat of syncretism

Missionaries very well know that new Christian communities live under permanent threat. Owing to their human history, the network of their social relations and indeed the very air they breathe, they are submitted to influences that are utterly foreign to the theocentric

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55 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 417.

56 Ibid., p. 58.

57 Ibid., p. 59.

character of the Christian faith. Yet, in order to be a true Church, the Christian community must have broken with the man-centred or naturalistic orientations of its past history and its present environment. The danger that threatens all new Christian communities is that of syncretism.

For Dr Kraemer syncretism was much more - or much worse - than a simple cultural phenomenon. It constituted a perennial threat to the purity of the Christian faith against which missionaries must be ever on their guard<sup>58</sup>. In his Religion and the Christian Faith Dr Kraemer devotes to syncretism two chapters which embody his final thought on

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<sup>58</sup> Dr Kraemer published a number of writings on syncretism. His opening lecture as Professor of the History of Religions at Leiden dealt with De wortelen van het syncretisme. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van Hoogleraar in de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid aan de Rijks-Universiteit te Leiden op 3 december 1937, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1937, 28 p. Pages 200-211 of The Christian Message consider the same subject, mainly from a missionary point of view. An article entitled "Syncretism as a Religious and a Missionary Problem" appeared in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 43, No. 3, July 1954, p. 253-273. This material was reproduced with minor changes and additions in Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 387-417. Dr Kraemer further wrote the article "Synkretismus" for the Weltkirchen Lexikon: Handbuch der Ökumene. Im Auftrag des deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages, hrsg. von Franklin Littell und Hans Hermann Walz, unter Beratung von Georges Florovsky (et al.), Stuttgart, Kreuz-Verlag, 1960, col. 1416-1419. Finally Dr Kraemer contributed a letter, "Syncretism as a Theological Problem for Missions" to The Theology of the Christian Mission, ed. by G.H. Anderson, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961, p. 179-182. The tone of this last piece of writing on syncretism displays the author's impatient conviction of having said all that mattered on the subject and of having said it right, and the regret of not having been heard.

that topic<sup>59</sup>. He draws a distinction between "conscious syncretism", of which the religion founded by Manes remains a classic example, and "primitive syncretism" which is the "spontaneous amalgamation of elements of various origin"<sup>60</sup>, as was the case for the great religions of Asia.

Spontaneous syncretism is a threat to the prophetic character of the true religion. Dr Kraemer sees in it "a first-class issue"<sup>61</sup> for the Christian Churches living and growing in Asia in particular. To the question raised by the problem of syncretism he proposes an indirect and a direct answer.

The indirect answer avoids meeting the incursions of syncretism head-on. Rather it consists in raising Christian communities that will strive to become true Churches. Dr Kraemer mentions three ways in which this can be achieved. First of all, care should be taken to ensure that the community maintains that quality of life which is rooted in Christ-inspired attitudes, whilst at the same time bringing towards its environment the adaptation "of a seed sown in a

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59 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, Chapter 24: "Syncretism as a Problem for Religion", p. 387-403 and Chapter 25: "Syncretism as a Missionary Problem", p. 404-417. For our use of Religion and the Christian Faith in this study, see note 2 on page 78.

60 Ibid., p. 401.

61 Ibid., p. 404.

specific soil"<sup>62</sup>. Secondly, the education of the community should be nurtured by the spirit of the Bible, which means that its faithful should be familiar with Holy Scripture. Finally, the community should be provided with a ferment, a leaven, consisting of educated Christians capable of accounting for the faith which is theirs.

However important this circuitous way of tackling syncretism may be, a direct answer, though difficult and complicated in its practical applications, cannot be disregarded. If the indigenous Church is to avoid becoming a mere ghetto with all the social and cultural consequences that ensue, it must enter into communication and dialogue with the traditional culture in which it grows and with the representatives and leaders of that culture. One practical way of achieving this is suggested by Dr Kraemer in a passage which, although referring to South-East Asia, is valid for all mission territories. His advice is that the Churches "must have men from their own ranks who combine competent, scholarly knowledge of their religious environment with theological insight and missionary spirit"<sup>63</sup>. In this matter too a missionary spirit is of the utmost importance.

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62 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 410.

63 Ibid., p. 417. Dr Kraemer's italics.

What we have been saying so far refers to the new Christian congregations which live their new-found life in keeping with the ideal of a true Church, or at least faithfully struggle to move closer to that ideal. Another important point must now be touched upon: it concerns the indigenous character of the Christian communities.

The dilemma of adaptation

We have already mentioned Dr Kraemer's well-grounded fear that the groups of converts might fall back upon themselves living in ghettos and keeping little contact with their own culture. It is vitally important, however, that the Christian communities should feel indigenous and should be perceived as such and not as totally foreign elements in their environment. One way of warding off the impression of foreignness is through adaptation.

The dilemma which is inherent in the practice of adaptation or accommodation is well explained by Dr Kraemer. Discussing in The Christian Message various positions towards the non-Christian religions, he points out that a truly apostolic approach

involves the announcement of the Message of God which is not adaptable to any religion or philosophy, and which yet has to be presented in a persuasive and winning manner so as to evince the real Christian spirit of service to God and to man.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 302.

If the message itself is beyond adaptation because it necessarily aims at conversion and demands a break with former religious attitudes and a new life of obedience to the word of God, it ought nevertheless to be presented in a way which is understandable. It must be conveyed in "terms and modes of expression that make its challenge intelligible"<sup>65</sup>.

This is no easy task since missionaries are wont to identify the truth they bring with the modes of speech and the symbolism in which this truth is clothed in their own religious tradition<sup>66</sup>. As a direct result of this, the native communities show very little creativity since "their indigenous and spontaneous faculties of religious expression are continuously being hindered and inhibited"<sup>67</sup>.

In the matter of adaptation, Dr Kraemer is prepared to go a long way; adaptation should extend to the vocabulary, the modes of expression, the forms of worship and even the structures. He is not averse to using the religious and philosophical terminologies of the great non-Christian religions. These, too, may be given a Christian content when they

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65 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 303.

66 In a later publication, The Communication of the Christian Faith (1956), p. 50, Dr Kraemer could still write that "the perennial problem of missions is that of communication".

67 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 321.

are used by people whose minds have been truly converted<sup>68</sup>. When he speaks of the social structures and institutions of tribal Africa he asserts that these as well, except in patent cases of unsuitability, "are the natural vehicles of Christianity"<sup>69</sup>.

We may sum up these views of Dr Kraemer's on adaptation with a guiding principle that should help the missionary to decide when to employ or reject "the mental and social means of indigenous expression"<sup>70</sup>. This is best formulated in Dr Kraemer's own words:

From the standpoint of the theocentric conception of the nature of the Church the first missionary task is to discover what, according to God's pleasure, as evident also in the people's natural heritage and faculties, are for this people in regard to confession, worship, witness, propagation, administration and discipline the most fertile ways of expressing their own spiritual life and their own attainments in Christ.<sup>71</sup>

#### The autonomy of the new Churches

The natural growth of local congregations that are thoroughly Christian and really indigenous finds its normal crowning in the establishment of an independent Church. In

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68 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 326.

69 Ibid., p. 341.

70 Ibid., p. 344.

71 Ibid., p. 422. Dr Kraemer's italics.

his 1930 report on "The Javanese Christian Congregations of East Java"<sup>72</sup> Dr Kraemer agrees with the ideal objectives of self-support, self-government and self-propagation for the new Christian communities, not however as conditions for independence but as qualities to be practised in a climate of independence by the congregations themselves, freed from the feeling that their interests are still the exclusive responsibility of the missionary organizations<sup>73</sup>. Although Dr Kraemer noted with disappointment that this feeling was still prevalent among the Javanese congregations, his report led to the establishment of the independent Church of East Java in 1931.

In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer mentions again as "the aim of all missionary work the establishment of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating Churches"<sup>74</sup> in accordance with the formulation of Sir Henry Venn in 1854. But obviously some of the young Churches had not yet reached the complete independence that comes with full self-support. Indeed some missionary agencies, according to Dr Kraemer,

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72 Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 73-95.

73 Cf. Ibid., p. 91.

74 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 424.

take the point of view that as long as an indigenous Church is living on money coming from foreign missionary sources, the missionary agencies have the right and the duty to control the way in which the money is spent.<sup>75</sup>

Dr Kraemer thinks this attitude is wrong. Financial support is but fraternal help and ought to play no role in determining what degree of independence a Church should be granted, and the missionaries ought to abide by the principle that "the fellowship of Christians who together form an indigenous Church is (...) under any circumstances an independent body, whose only legitimate Head and Authority is Christ"<sup>76</sup>.

### 3. Revelation and the Non-Christian Religions.

Dr Kraemer deals expressly with the topic of revelation in two of his publications: The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World and Religion and the Christian Faith. In the latter work he enlarged on ideas already put forward in the first book in order to meet criticism or clarify his position. We shall in the main refer to those two books as we sketch out his thought on Christian revelation, particularly in its relation to the non-Christian religions.

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<sup>75</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 425.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 426.

## A. The Nature of Christian Revelation.

When Dr Kraemer speaks of revelation in The Christian Message, he admits that such a concept "is not at all an exclusive Christian idea or Biblical presupposition. It is a universal religious conception"<sup>77</sup>. He adds that when it is used "in its proper sense" revelation implies the idea of "what is by its nature inaccessible and remains so, even when it is revealed"<sup>78</sup>. To illustrate his meaning Dr Kraemer quotes the well-known words of Paul in I Cor. 2: 9,10:

What no eye has ever seen, what no ear has ever heard, what never entered the mind of man, God has prepared all that for those who love Him. And God has revealed it to us by the Spirit, for the Spirit fathoms everything, even the depths of God.<sup>79</sup>

Revelation and faith

Disclosing what yet remains hidden is a feature peculiar in its uniqueness to the Christian conception of revelation. The revealing obscurity of Christian revelation finds its best example in the Incarnation through which "God was truly revealed in Jesus Christ, but at the same time He hid and disguised Himself in the man Jesus Christ"<sup>80</sup>. For

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<sup>77</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

this reason, because revelation is at the same time disclosure and mystery, it can only be apprehended by man in faith. As Dr Kraemer explains,

It lies in the very nature of divine revelation that the only organ for apprehending it is faith; and for the same reason faith, in this strictly religious sense, can only be appropriately defined as at the same time a divine gift and a human act.<sup>81</sup>

Only faith is equal to revelation and can perceive it in its legitimate source which is the Bible. Only in the Bible should "a knowledge of the Christian Faith in its real substance"<sup>82</sup> be looked for and only there will it be found. In the Bible one also notices the special character of divine revelation which is not primarily concerned with ideas or concepts, but deals with events and deeds. Dr Kraemer insists that biblical revelation is factual. He admits, of course, that this revelation has in the course of history been the source of notions and theories, but these, he points out, "are never adequate to or to be identified with the revelation from which they flow"<sup>83</sup>.

Further on Kraemer enlarges on this aspect and explains that

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81 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 69.

82 Ibid., p. 61.

83 Ibid.

the Bible offers no religious or moral philosophy, not even a theistic or Christocentric one. It is rebellious to all endeavours to reduce it to a body of truths and ideals about the personality of God, the infinite value of man, the source of ethical inspiration.<sup>84</sup>

What the Bible offers in fact is "a connected series of divine acts"<sup>85</sup>, "a tale about 'the wonderful things God has done' (Acts 2:11)"<sup>86</sup>. The Bible is the relation of God's repeated initiative in the course of history<sup>87</sup> culminating, as Kraemer puts it, in

the self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen Lord, which is a "stumbling-block" to the Jew, "sheer folly" to the Gentiles, and only adorable and saving mystery to the eye of faith.<sup>88</sup>

The idea of Biblical revelation as divine history is taken up again in Religion and the Christian Faith and reaffirmed with emphasis. Dr Kraemer writes:

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84 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 64.

85 Ibid., p. 61.

86 Ibid., p. 72.

87 Cf. ibid., p. 61.

88 Ibid., p. 70.

Revelation in the Bible is objective divine action, decisively in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the "Word made flesh". Strictly speaking, the word should be confined to this basic history.<sup>89</sup>

Behind this insistence on the historical nature of revelation, there lies no doubt a good deal of aversion to any conceptualization of Biblical data or, as Dr Kraemer says, to "guiding categories that are theological or philosophical terms (incarnation, theism), already in the first stage of abstraction"<sup>90</sup>. He fears lest such categories should conceal the dynamic character of revelation and the "totally personal character of truth in the Christian Message"<sup>91</sup>. Indeed, if there is any theology in the Bible, it is "relational theology, and not speculative"<sup>92</sup>.

Only faith then can know God as he has revealed himself in the Bible. But what about the man that lives outside the sphere of faith? Is there not in man a natural faculty which is equal to apprehending God in the world he has

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<sup>89</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 345. The last sentence in Dr Kraemer's quotation brings to mind a remark of K. Cragg's in Christianity in World Perspective, London, Lutterworth Press, 1969, p. 78: "By this Divine absolutism in Jesus Christ Kraemer reduces the content of all other faiths to incidental traces, not essential elements, of what God has decisively chosen to vouchsafe outside them." Cragg was commenting on Dr Kraemer's Why Christianity of all Religions?, London, Lutterworth Press, 1962, 125 p.

<sup>90</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 220.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

created? Can man arrive at a certain knowledge of God through reason alone?

### Revelation and reason

Dr Kraemer's answer is to point out first that in such a question the problem of the relation of reason to revelation is not properly set. Reason ought not to be viewed over against revelation, but within revelation. Should opposition be thought to exist between reason and revelation "as two orders of truth, both understood as rational orders of knowledge in the sense of rational discursive knowing"<sup>93</sup>, this would amount to a distortion of revelation "contrary to the whole evidence of the Biblical kerygma, one of the most acute 'Hellenizings' that can be imagined"<sup>94</sup>. Historically, the controversy between reason and revelation can be explained in terms of a great struggle "between self-determinative human thinking and thinking in the light of revelation"<sup>95</sup>. All opposition disappears, however, and reason gets its legitimate place when it submits

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<sup>93</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 344. Dr Kraemer's italics. What Dr Kraemer writes in Religion and the Christian Faith is obviously an answer to criticism voiced against his view that reason cannot arrive at a true knowledge of God. E.C. Dewick in The Christian Attitude to other Religions, Cambridge, University Press, 1953, p. 162, had chided him for "his flight from reason".

<sup>94</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 345.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

to revelation. And Kraemer concludes that

in the light of Biblical thinking, reason is not devaluated or sceptically weakened, but gets its valid, important place.

What really happens is that in the context of Biblical thinking reason is removed from the usurped throne of being the essential and primary mark of man.<sup>96</sup>

Reason then must be guided by Biblical revelation.

In these conditions one understands why Dr Kraemer takes issue with the concept of a general revelation that lies outside the province of faith and is amenable to the efforts of reason. The phrase 'general revelation' is misleading, Kraemer says, and he explains:

The initial difficulty is that, when we take seriously the Biblical way of speaking of revelation as God's active self-disclosure out of direct, personal concern for man, and directed towards the creative re-establishment of the relation of God with man, every kind of revelation is a "special revelation".<sup>97</sup>

#### Revelation and natural theology

The objection that this view raises directly is that by this token no distinction can be drawn any more between God's self-disclosure in nature mentioned by Paul in his epistle to the Romans (1:18-20; 2:14-16) and his ultimate and final

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96 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 347.

97 Ibid., p. 353. Bishop L. Newbigin in The Finality of Christ, London, SCM Press, 1969, p. 75, thinks that Dr Kraemer's understanding of revelation does away with the disjunction that should be maintained between faith and revelation.

self-disclosure in Christ. Dr Kraemer acknowledges the difficulty but insists that the terminology of revelation should take into account the fact that

it is impossible for Christian thinking to interpret God's revelation in nature, history and conscience as independent fields. Their interpretation can only be legitimately expressed in the light of the revelation in Christ.<sup>98</sup>

This way of perceiving revelation leaves inevitably no room for natural theology, a theology that would argue about God from the exclusive findings of human reason. Indeed, Dr Kraemer does not hesitate to call such a theology "an alien, awkward instrument for interpreting the Biblical attitude"<sup>99</sup>, since "it works with an idea of Deity common to everybody who believes in God and transcending all 'special' ideas of God"<sup>100</sup>. This cannot be admitted, he argues, since this would mean in effect

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98 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 353.

99 Ibid.; p. 360. Prof. A.R. Gualtieri in his unpublished dissertation Theological Evaluations by Christians of the Religious Faith of Non-Christians, Montreal, McGill University, 1969, p. 218, remarks that "it is difficult to extract from Kraemer's writings a consistent use of the terms 'natural theology' and 'general revelation'." This is true but quite in keeping with Dr Kraemer's idea of revelation.

100 Ibid., p. 361.

making the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "the only true God", according to John 17:3, a subordinate idea, which can fit in with a philosophy of religion but not with theology which understands its real function, i.e. faithful interpretation of Biblical teaching.<sup>101</sup>

These words show with clarity how much our author is obsessed by the importance of looking at everything in the light of Biblical revelation. It was his conviction that the Christian thinker could never abstract from his faith, as he affirms in so many words in the following passage:

Under all conditions, in all kinds of work (including this work of interpreting and evaluating the non-Christian religions, which calls for a great amount of scholarly work), he (i.e. the Christian thinker) remains primarily a disciple, a captive of Jesus Christ, in whom God disclosed himself, full of grace and truth.<sup>102</sup>

#### B. Revelation and the Non-Christian Religions

The revelation of God, whether in nature, history or the conscience of men, cannot be split into independent fields of knowledge. In other words, the non-Christian religions themselves can only be properly considered in the light of God's revelation in the Bible.

Yet it is still permissible to conceive of a scientific approach to non-Christian religions at the lower level of rational methodology. In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer

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101 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 361.

102 Ibid., p. 144.

explains what he means by that:

Scientifically speaking, the most fruitful way to acquire true insight into a religion is the "totalitarian" approach, namely, to take a religion as one whole body of religious life and expression, of which all the component parts are inseparably interrelated to each other and animated by the same apprehension of the totality of existence peculiar to it.<sup>103</sup>

In his later work on Religion and the Christian Faith, he still favours this hermeneutic instrument in his study of the great religions. After mentioning the similar views of the English writer Christopher Dawson, he concludes that "religion is the response by the totality of man's being to the totality of existence, and is therefore by nature (though not always in practice) 'totalitarian'".<sup>104</sup> Dr Kraemer's totalitarian perception of religions looms large in the way he looks at non-Christian religions and is important because of its

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<sup>103</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 146. On the totalitarian approach to religions, Rev. de Menasce, after conceding that the history of religions is moving in that direction, remarks in his review of Dr Kraemer's book, "La Théologie de la Mission selon M. Kraemer", in Nouvelle Revue de Science Missionnaire, Vol. 1, October 1945, p. 251 that "it is an error to ascribe to all religions that 'totalitarianism' referred to by Mr. Kraemer which would make them all entirely and radically impervious to any influence of grace whatsoever" (C'est une erreur que d'attribuer à toutes les religions ce 'totalitarisme' dont parle M. Kraemer, qui les rendrait tout entières et radicalement exclusives de tout effet de grâce). T. Ohm in Die Liebe zu Gott in den nichtchristlichen Religionen, Freiburg im Breisgau, E. Wewel Verlag, 1957, p. 429-431 shares De Menasce's point of view and insists on the syncretistic character of the non-Christian religions.

<sup>104</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 38.

practical consequences for a missionary approach to those religions.

The dialectical character of revelation

Nevertheless, and even though scientific hypotheses may yield some understanding of the religious phenomenon in man, it must always be borne in mind that reason alone cannot provide the ultimate answer since only revelation can deliver that. And if revelation is called upon to shed light on the religious world of man, then this revelation must be accepted with its full dialectical character. This is the principle stated by Dr Kraemer in The Christian Message. He writes:

Speaking from the standpoint of the revelation in Christ, who is the Measure of all things, the "dialectical" approach, which is included in the view that the revelation in Christ has of all human existence, is the only right one by means of which to acquire a true and adequate insight.<sup>105</sup>

Dr Kraemer never departed from this way of looking at non-Christian religions. In his preface to Religion and the Christian Faith he raises the question whether the great religions - and among these he will not shrink from including empirical Christianity - are "responses and places of encounter" with God, and once more he makes clear that his answer will be "dialectical as a parallel to the dialectical character of Religious Truth, manifest in Biblical

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<sup>105</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 146.

Revelation"<sup>106</sup>.

The dialectical character of biblical revelation is above all expressed by the 'yes' and 'no' that God says to man. To prove his contention, Dr Kraemer goes into an elaborate exegesis of Romans 1:16-18. He sums up his conclusions by insisting that "God, who is the God of righteous, holy love, is as such bent on saving sinners, and also, as such, the God of wrath on all the 'adikía of men"<sup>107</sup>. This 'adikía or wickedness of men Paul pictures in grim colours in the subsequent verses of Romans 1:19-32. Referring to Paul's words, Dr Kraemer points again at the wrong response of men to God's revelation in nature and the universe. This appears with frightening evidence in their religious creations. "They pervert everything, Dr Kraemer says, particularly in the field of worship and in regard to the objects of worship"<sup>108</sup>. God's revelation to man, man's response to God's self-disclosure in nature, and God's wrath visited upon man as a result of the latter's depravity, Dr Kraemer construes as a dialogue between God and man where man meets God's advances with a perverted reply, upon which God finally 'gives him up'. And this 'giving up', Dr Kraemer explains, is an act of God that still

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106 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 6.

107 Ibid., p. 292.

108 Ibid., p. 294.

displays his concern for man.

All of Chapter 17 in Religion and the Christian Faith on "The Righteousness and Wrath of God" deals with Pauline sayings and is intended as an illustration of what Dr Kraemer means by a dialectical approach to the great religions or to religion in general. From his elaborate analysis of Paul's teaching, especially as found in Romans and in Acts, Dr Kraemer feels justified in concluding that the Apostle's view of the non-Christian world is also dialectical. He winds up his study in the following passage:

Therefore in an indirect sense, it seems to me, Paul certainly sees the highest religious and philosophical aspirations both in the light of gropings (Acts 17) and in that of "ignorance" (Acts 17), i.e. in the light of God, and in that of ultimately "futile speculations" (Rom. 1:21). Thus far we can go when combining Rom. 1:18-32 with Paul's speech at Athens. Always he is dialectical in judgment, because man's condition is dialectical.<sup>109</sup>

From the biblical point of view one can then speak of "The Divine-Human Drama"<sup>110</sup> where, as Kraemer puts it,

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109 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 298.

110 "The Divine-Human Drama" is the title of Chapter 19 in Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 321-339.

the divine dialectic can be expressed in the keywords: self-forgetting love - saving wrath; the human dialectic in: rebellion and escape - search for righteousness and groping for truth.<sup>111</sup>

The dialectical approach to non-Christian religions

In this perspective Dr Kraemer hopes to abide in his assessment of the great religions by a biblical standard that is at the same time radical and all-embracing. In his preface to Religion and the Christian Faith, he notes that the theological interpretations offered from the first centuries of Church history up to the present time, although not without great value, are all more or less, to use his own words, "defective in one essential point, that is to say, a radical Biblical orientation which takes into account the whole Bible"<sup>112</sup>. With the exception, however, of Calvin, Luther and Hamann<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>111</sup> Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 321. For a thorough analysis of the influence of Barthian theology on Dr Kraemer's dialectical understanding of revelation, cf. J. Aagaard's "Revelation and Religion", in Studia Theologica, Vol. 14, Fasc. 2, 1960, p. 148-185. Aagaard's study is based on "Scandinavian Lutheran criticism", ibid., p. 169.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 7, no. (6).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. ibid. Dr Kraemer calls Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) "the first 'dialectical' Christian thinker", ibid., p. 179. It is tempting to speculate that our author came to a knowledge of Hamann through Kierkegaard who held him in great esteem.

This mention of Calvin is particularly enlightening. No one may doubt the influence of such modern theologians as Brunner and Barth on the thought of Hendrik Kraemer. Dr Kraemer himself admitted this. In the vexed question of natural theology, which opposed Barth to Brunner, he even came out in favour of Brunner's thesis<sup>114</sup>. Still, the long passages that he devotes to Calvin in his Religion and the Christian Faith are evidence enough of the French Reformer's influence on his thought<sup>115</sup>. What is often overlooked is how faithful Dr Kraemer's has remained to Calvin's judgment on 'pagan' religion. If one excepts the dialectical frame, borrowed from the theologians of crisis, our author's estimate of the religions of non-Christian man dovetails perfectly with that of Calvin<sup>116</sup>.

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114 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 120, where the author complains that Barth's position on natural theology "breathes not sufficiently the free atmosphere of Biblical realism".

115 Cf. Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 169-172, 376-378 and passim.

116 Cf. for instance this passage from Calvin's commentary on Hebrews 11:6, quoted by F. Wendel, Calvin, London, William Collins and Son, Fontana Library, 1969, p. 155: "Men labour in vain to serve God, if they do not know the right way, and that the religions that have nothing of the true and certain knowledge of God, all added together, are not only vain but harmful, for all those who do not distinguish God from idols are unable to have access to him." Wendel's whole development on "The Knowledge of God and of Revelation" according to Calvin p. 151-164, is relevant to our topic.

The use of the dialectical method can best be observed in those pages of The Christian Message that dwell on non-prophetic religions<sup>117</sup>. According to Dr Kraemer, man's repeated swinging to and from between a rebellion implying escape from God and the search for righteousness and truth is a basic feature of all man-made religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and the great religious systems of China and Japan. There stands out one common trait in all these religions, which Dr Kraemer labels naturalistic. All of them are grounded in or derived from "the primitive apprehension of the totality of existence"<sup>118</sup>. As he looks into the depths of the primitive Weltanschauung Dr Kraemer points to four of its most specific characters. He notes first of all

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<sup>117</sup> Dr Kraemer classifies the religions according as they are based on a revelation or not. In The Christian Message, p. 142, he writes: "The most pertinent division is that into prophetic religions of revelation and naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization. Under the first heading fall Christianity, Judaism, and, as being historically and by its nature related to the Christian and Jewish background, to a certain degree also Islam." Whenever we speak here of non-Christian religions, we are referring only to the non-prophetic or naturalist religions.

<sup>118</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 148.

the absolute interdependence of all spheres of life - the economic, the social, the religious - and consequently the total absence of conscious differentiation and specialization.<sup>119</sup>

And he adds that such a life-system is "governed and maintained by the rigid and unassailable authority of tradition"<sup>120</sup>.

Secondly, this apprehension is pervaded throughout by a totalitarian or monistic view of the universe. Dr Kraemer explains that

in an unreflective, spontaneous way it starts from the conception of totality and of unbroken, primeval unity, which comprises and dominates the whole range of reality in nature and human life with all its distinctions, nuances and correspondences.<sup>121</sup>

Another essential feature of the primitive world of monism is its fundamental relativism, since "in this monistic atmosphere of inter-related and counter-balancing entities no religious or ethical absolute, that is a really irrevocable absolute, is possible"<sup>122</sup>.

Finally, in the non-Christian world all religions are actuated by the overriding lust of life. In other words,

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<sup>119</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 150.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 152. Hallencreutz in Kraemer Towards Tambaram, p. 244-248, explains how the author of The Christian Message came to accept monism as the basic view of the universe in the great non-Christian religions. Ohm in Die Liebe zu Gott in den nichtchristlichen Religionen, p. 66-67, discusses Dr Kraemer's presupposition and expresses his disagreement: "I cannot follow him", he says (so kann ich ihn nicht folgen).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

they are all driven by vitalistic objectives. To quote from The Christian Message again:

In the sphere of the naturalistic monism of the primitive apprehension of reality the perpetuation and strengthening of individual and corporate life, which are virtually concretions of the immanent vital urge of the universe, become the object of religion and its practice.<sup>123</sup>

In the light of Biblical revelation what ought one to think of this primitive apprehension of existence as Dr Kraemer outlines it with its four characteristics: its institutional interdependence guaranteed by tradition, its totalitarian monism, its all-embracing relativism and its eudaemonistic vitalism? For Dr Kraemer such a view of the world is totally alien to the nature of biblical realism

with its radical insistence on God as God, the Living Lord and Creator of man and the world, and in which sin and holiness are taken radically as what they are, namely, the disobedient human will and its resistance against the pure and perfect Will.<sup>124</sup>

The important point to remember, however, is not that this view is alien or opposed to biblical realism; it is rather that it is based upon a responsible decision of man. This observation allows Dr Kraemer to put in a nutshell his main principle for judging the non-Christian religions:

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<sup>123</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 155.  
Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

Every form of apprehension of existence, the primitive one included, is therefore not "merely" a type of thinking or of psychological structure, but it is a choice and decision in the face of the totality of existence. These choices and decisions must be placed in the judging and saving light of the revelation in Christ.<sup>125</sup>

A couple of examples will show how Dr Kraemer handles the category of "primitive apprehension of existence" in his assessment of the religious creations of man. After dwelling at some length on a particularly refined form of Hinduism, namely bhakti-religion, he concludes that this kind of pietism

rebels against, but is not really emancipated from, the basic naturalistic monism of Hinduism, and therefore neither from the anthropocentric and eudaemonistic tendencies that are inherent in this monism.<sup>126</sup>

When he comes to Buddhism Dr Kraemer pronounces a similar judgment. Although he sees in the growth of that religion "one of the most superb plants that have sprung from the fertile soil of Hinduism"<sup>127</sup> and without denying the riches to be found in its various schools of thought, he still cannot but express the opinion that that great system

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125 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 158.

126 Ibid., p. 173. Bhakti-religion, which could be described as the religion of the heart's devotion for the Godhead, is based on some of the Hindu holy writings contained in the Bhagavadgita. Its foremost exponent or theologian was Ramanuja who lived in the 11th century.

127 Ibid., p. 174.

became by listening to the lure of unvanquished naturalistic monism and by the anthropocentric orientation of its soteriology the most consistent and unscrupulous exponent of this monism, and a huge syncretistic religion.<sup>128</sup>

And in like manner with the other religions.

No one will deny that our author is always at pains to present in as fair a way as possible the remarkable achievements of certain of the religions he studies. There are indeed in Dr Kraemer's exposition glowing descriptions of such achievements. But one is reminded all the time with the fatality of a foregone conclusion that, whatever heights those religions may have reached, "the prophetic religion of Biblical realism, however, moves in an entirely different sphere"<sup>129</sup>. Yet Dr Kraemer's procedure is altogether consistent with his dialectical perspective in which the loftiest realizations in the field of religion always appear as radically vitiated. The conviction that inspires him is well expressed in the following words of The Christian

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128 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 177.

129 Ibid., p. 180. At the 1938 Tambaram Conference which used Dr Kraemer's book as a kind of textbook, most Eastern delegates were deeply distressed by the author's negative assessment of what was after all part of their cultural heritage. Cf. A. Th. van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk, p. 29. For a detailed survey of Eastern reactions to Dr Kraemer's theological approach to non-Christian religions cf. J.J.E. van Lin, Protestantse theologie der godsdiensten: van Edinburgh naar Tambaram (1910-1938), p. 329-354.

Message borrowed from a chapter which deals precisely with

"The Attitude towards non-Christian Religions":

In the domain of the religious consciousness man's possibilities and abilities shine in the lofty religions and the ethical systems that he has produced and tried to live by. The non-Christian world in the past and the present offers many illustrious examples. His sin and his subjection to evil and satanic forces, however, corrupt all his creations and achievements, even the sublimest, in the most vicious way.<sup>130</sup>

#### God and the non-Christian religions

So far the argument has been conducted from man's standpoint. What he has achieved in his religions turns out in the dialectical view to be lying completely outside the world of biblical realism. But what of God? Does He too move only within the sphere of biblical revelation?

Dr Kraemer will have nothing to do with so restricting a view of the divine activity and observes that "no man, and certainly no Christian, can claim the power or the right to limit God's revelatory working"<sup>131</sup>. If such be the case,

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<sup>130</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 112-113. Dr Kraemer's special use of the dialectic always ends on a negative note, at least in the field of religious anthropology. For more on this cf. Prof. A.R. Gualtieri's article "The Failure of Dialectic in Hendrik Kraemer's Evaluation of Non-Christian Faith", in Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 15, No. 2, Spring 1978, p. 274-290. When all is said and done, one must agree that Dr Kraemer's dialectic has little to do with Hegel's: it operates after the Kierkegaardian model.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

can one find out in non-Christian religions clear instances of God's "revelatory working"? Dr Kraemer thinks not. He writes in The Christian Message that it is not possible "to indicate systematically and concretely where God revealed Himself and wrestled and wrestles with man in the non-Christian religions"<sup>132</sup>. This is no casual remark. Towards the end of his book our author, although still holding that God is active in man and the world, reaffirms that "no human mind is able to indicate when exactly He is at work and where not"<sup>133</sup>.

Later Dr Kraemer would to a certain extent shift his ground. In Religion and the Christian Faith he posits as the locus of encounter between man and God - outside biblical revelation - human religious consciousness rather than the religious systems created by mankind. In that religious consciousness, he says, "the negative or partly positive" answer to this encounter <sup>134</sup> takes place. He thinks that this change of venue will make it easier "to express definite opinions (though necessarily always open to revision) on this encounter"<sup>135</sup>. The author himself adduces a few instances of

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132 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 127.

133 Ibid., p. 428-429.

134 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 8.

135 Ibid.

man's yes-and-no response to God. He mentions the myth of "the death and sacrifice of a god" in Indonesia<sup>136</sup> and the themes of the great tragedies of ancient Greece<sup>137</sup>. But these are little more than gleanings, the meaning of which Dr. Kraemer sums up as follows:

the deepest Ahnungen, the highest flights, the sincerest contrition, remain in the sphere of a lofty moralism or spirituality. Nowhere do we find a radical repudiation of every possible man-made spiritual world, which is the uncanny power of the gospel. Just where we seem to be nearest to the gospel, it appears often that we are farthest away from it.<sup>138</sup>

Listening to this one may well wonder whether our author's avowed change of mind has any practical bearing at all on his theological evaluation of non-Christian religions. Whether God works through the religious systems of humanity or inside man's religious consciousness, the answer to God's invitations comes in the last resort from a being subjected to the forces of sin and evil. When one tries to assess how much of God's active presence can be perceived in the natural

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136 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 323.

137 Cf. Ibid., p. 332.

138 Ibid., p. 334. The author advocates the same dialectical approach in respect of empirical Christianity. In The Christian Message, p. 145, he writes: "We have acquired the freedom to apply to empirical Christianity the same dialectical and 'totalitarian' view as to other religions, and honesty requires us to do this courageously for the sake of benefit to Christianity itself." A similar stand is taken in Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 335-338.

religions of man, the truth of the matter seems to lie in this simple sentence of our author: "One can never speak in terms of 'or-or', nor in terms of 'and-and', but only in terms beyond both"<sup>139</sup>.

Fulfilment and points of contact

At all events it is clear that one cannot see in the great religions some kind of preparation to the Gospel. It would also be wrong to regard them as the expression of religious cravings that find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

This kind of theological evaluation, Dr Kraemer writes,

which conceives the Gospel as essentially the fulfilment, the highest development and budding forth of the religious forces and seeds in mankind, overlooks - we repeat - the sui generis character of the revelation of Christ.<sup>140</sup>

That revelation is not directed towards fulfilment, it implies rather "conversion and regeneration"<sup>141</sup>. It is futile then to harp on continuity between the efforts of man to arrive at God and the self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ. In one of the Tambaram papers our author laboured the point that

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139 Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 352.

140 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 123.

141 Ibid., p. 124.

the relation of the world of spiritual realities, spread out before us in biblical realism, toward the world which is manifested in the whole range of religious experience and striving is not that of continuity, but of discontinuity.<sup>142</sup>

The discontinuity that biblical realism lays bare when it is brought to bear upon the non-Christian religions results in an important consequence: a search for so-called points of contact between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions will lead one to a mare's nest. Not only does the totalitarian character of those religions make this search futile, but emerging similarities will prove to be illusory. Dr Kraemer insists that

in the illuminating light of the revelation in Christ, which lays bare the moving and grand but at the same time distressing and desperate reality of human religious life, as reflected in the various religions, all "similarities" and points of contact become dissimilarities.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Continuity or Discontinuity", in The Authority of the Faith, Vol. 1 of the Tamparam, Madras, Series of the International Missionary Council Conference, December 12th to 29th 1938, New York, International Missionary Council, 1939, p. 2. In Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 351, Dr Kraemer has these words on the subject of continuity and discontinuity: "The two dialectics, the divine and the human, which I have repeatedly explained as manifesting their interplay in countless ways in the religions, make the whole controversy of 'continuity' or 'discontinuity' superfluous". But he is still holding out for discontinuity nevertheless and he writes, p. 352: "In fact, therefore, the only reason we have to side so resolutely with 'discontinuity' and argue for it, is that the 'continuity' standpoint has so many able advocates, and that it is evidently so seductive!"

<sup>143</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 136.

In fact points of contact in the true acceptance of the word can only be found by antithesis, that is to say, as our author explains:

by discovering in the revealing light of Christ the fundamental misdirection that dominates all religious life and at the same time the groping for God which throbs in this misdirection, and which finds an unsuspected divine solution in Christ.<sup>144</sup>

But if it is correct that the similarities the missionary comes across in the non-Christian religions are but specious appearances and misdirected gropings which he cannot use in his preaching of the Gospel lest he should prejudice the biblical realism of revelation, he may well feel that he has been entrusted with an impossible task. Dr Kraemer, however, thinks that the situation is not without remedy, for the one true point of contact is provided by the missionary himself.

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<sup>144</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 139.

4. The Pastoral Qualifications of the Missionary<sup>145</sup>.Admonitions to missionaries in the Dutch East Indies

In 1933 Dr Kraemer was invited by the Conference of Missionaries to visit West Java and look into the difficulties that stood in the way of the Gospel among the Sundanese people living in that part of the island. In his final report he put forward four reasons why the work of evangelism had up to then made such little headway in the region. In addition to an unfortunate set of circumstances, he mentioned narrow-mindedness, inability and unwillingness on the part of missionaries as the main causes for failure and stagnation.

By narrow-mindedness, Dr Kraemer referred to the missionaries' tendency "through lack of self-criticism"<sup>146</sup> to limit their preaching to a form and content of Christianity

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<sup>145</sup> In the following pages we will not discuss the place of the missionary in the theology of the Christian mission. For Dr Kraemer's views on this question cf. his 1941 essay on "De Plaats van den Zendeling" reproduced in De Kerk in beweging, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1947, p. 206-222. He defines the missionary as follows, p. 220: "A 'Verbi Divini Minister', since he is sent by the Church to bring the Kerygma into the non-Christian world, to plant the Church, taking into account the concrete reality in which God makes it live there and calls upon it to witness in word and deed, and to raise and strengthen the Church." (...een "Verbi Divini Minister", daar hij door de Kerk wordt uitgezonden om het kerygma in de niet-Christelijke wereld te doen doordringen, om de Kerk te planten, rekening houdend met de concrete werkelijkheid, waarin God haar daar doet leven en tot woorden daadgetuigenis roept, en om de Kerk op te kweken en te sterken).

<sup>146</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 105.

based exclusively on personal feelings and selective convictions. The picture that arose from their teaching was of something foreign and strange. As Dr Kraemer puts it, "The missionaries fancying that they spoke intelligible Sundanese, actually spoke unintelligible Latin"<sup>147</sup>. They had failed to start "from a formulation of spiritual problems as living in the indigenous soul, and thus touching existing chords"<sup>148</sup>.

With the mention of inability, Dr Kraemer was touching upon the question of training. Although the missionaries had gone through a good deal of schooling in the language, the depths of the indigenous soul still remained a hidden mystery for them because the language was not seen for what it was, namely an instrument permitting entry into the hearts of the local people. No missionary, for instance, was familiar with any Sundanese literature and therefore none enjoyed such knowledge of the native philosophy of life as would get him into touch with the Sundanese world. Stressing that this was the work of a life-time, "and a simple missionary duty"<sup>149</sup>, Dr Kraemer observed that disregard of this important matter had resulted in the missionaries' continuing

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147 Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 105.

148 Ibid., p. 106. Dr Kraemer's italics.

149 Ibid., p.107.

as "foreigners and marginal residents"<sup>150</sup>. What was even worse, he went on to say, the very "Indigenous helpers and Christian groups too have been isolated from the Sundanese people"<sup>151</sup>.

Finally, the missionaries' unwillingness Dr Kraemer defined as the lack of adequate response to what the Sundanese expected of the mission. He pointed out that

the Gospel and the status of missionary must entail a total surrender of ourselves, utterly loving ourselves, completely doing away with any actual or supposed superiority, whether cultural or intellectual, religious, moral or innate.<sup>152</sup>

With this remark Dr Kraemer was tackling the delicate problem of the missionary's moral dispositions towards the people he had set out to evangelize. Very probably the term 'unwillingness' was a charitable one and Dr Kraemer may have been thinking of indifference, aloofness or selfishness. At any rate, he emphasizes the point that the missionary is by vocation called to "radical self-surrender"<sup>153</sup>. He ends this

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150 Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 107.

151 Ibid., p. 109.

152 Ibid., p. 111. Italics in the original. The phrase "utterly loving ourselves" sounds out of place in this context. In his book, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 80, Van Leeuwen quotes the report as follows: "een volkomen zelf-overgave, een zichzelf ontledigen van werkelijke of vermeende culturele (...) meerderheid", i.e. "a total surrender of ourselves, a self-freeing from real or supposed cultural (...) superiority".

153 Ibid., p. 111.

section of his report with the striking comment that "the missionary worker himself is always the greatest of all great missionary problems"<sup>154</sup>. Little wonder then that further on in the report one comes across the following observation: "the conversion of missionaries is at least as urgent as the conversion of Indigenous Christians"<sup>155</sup>.

Advice to missionaries in general

When Dr Kraemer wrote his report about the situation in West Java, he was dealing with the practical difficulties of mission workers in a well-defined environment. In The Christian Message too he deals with problems of evangelism, but these are primarily considered in the principles that they bring into play, for instance the principle that should guide the Christian faith in its relation to the non-Christian religions. Still, in his book the author has a good deal of practical advice to offer to the missionaries and comments freely on the attitudes and dispositions necessary to him who would serve the Christian mission.

There is all the more urgency to his statements since in his opinion the missionary provides the only true point of contact between the non-Christians and the Gospel. We now

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<sup>154</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 112.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 120. When Dr Kraemer made that remark, he was reporting on Christian community-building in West Java.

know that Dr Kraemer sets no great store by dubious points of contact: they hold more difference than similarity. Our author prefers to remind all mission workers that the "one point of contact is the disposition and the attitude of the missionary"<sup>156</sup>. He even formulates what he considers "the golden rule" or "the iron law" in the matter of missionary approach when he writes that "the strategic and absolutely dominant point in this whole important problem, when it has to be discussed in general terms, is the missionary worker himself"<sup>157</sup>.

Here is some of the practical advice that Dr Kraemer offers on the dispositions and attitudes that he would like to find in the missionary. Above all, he must be a man who has sloughed all spiritual arrogance since this attitude would only obscure his message<sup>158</sup>. In his contacts with the indigenous world he ought always to keep in mind "the dialectical condition of non-Christian religious life"<sup>159</sup>. His interest, deep and sincere, should extend to "the whole range of life of the people among whom (he) works, for Christ's sake and for the sake of those people"<sup>160</sup>. Moreover, he will

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156 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 140.

157 Ibid. Dr Kraemer's italics.

158 Cf. ibid., p. 110-111.

159 Ibid., p. 127.

160 Ibid., p. 140. Dr Kraemer's italics.

have to try and translate the message by "a constant process of self-denying training"<sup>161</sup>. He will not always manage to sidestep the skeins of controversy. Nor should debates be avoided as a matter of course. All argumentation, however, should be conducted in the spirit of "a vigorously religious conception of Christian truth with real knowledge of, and sympathy with, the people among whom one works"<sup>162</sup>. We may wind up this series of missionary traits with Dr Kraemer's implicit hope that the workers of the Gospel should be able "to emancipate themselves from the cultural, mental, emotional and social frame in which they are accustomed to live and to express their religious life"<sup>163</sup>.

This random collection of dispositions and attitudes describes in broad strokes the portrait of the ideal missionary, a rare species indeed, as Dr Kraemer himself admits when he reminds us that

the mental conquest of self and the imaginative capacity and self-denial needed to transpose oneself creatively into the spiritual and social reality of another cultural background are comparatively rare faculties all over the world.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 303.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. Dr Kraemer's italics.

However that may be, from all that has just been said there emerges in one's mind a very important conclusion. Although knowledge and insight cannot be dispensed with, they will prove of little use for the Gospel, Dr Kraemer warns us,

if the missionary or evangelist by what he really is as a man does not awaken that personal, human element of trust and confidence in himself as a man, without which all approach will remain barren.<sup>165</sup>

The Christian faith and non-Christian religions are abstractions which meet only in the minds of learned people. The missionary is the one point of contact that alone provides a living link between the God of Jesus Christ and the man of the non-Christian world.

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The title given to this summary study on Dr Kraemer's views of the Christian mission has about it an air of finality which is misleading. For this reason we made a point of setting those views inside the time-frame of the colonial period. It will be rightly inferred from this restriction that all the elements of the teaching set forth in the above pages are not intended to be taken as definitive and beyond recall. It is important to be reminded of this since Dr Kraemer is generally believed to be an intractable man particularly addicted to

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<sup>165</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 307.  
Dr Kraemer's italics.

rigid opinions. Given the right reasons Dr Kraemer would have readily changed his mind on anything, except on the centrality and finality of Jesus Christ. But this is not the place to argue this matter in all its minutiae.

If we stay with the mission of the Church and its apostolic endeavours, which are central to our purpose, we shall note that in The Christian Message the author at the very outset draws the attention of the World Missionary Conference at Tambaram to a practical point which he considers to be of extreme importance. He writes:

Therefore, re-orientation of the missionary enterprise is urgent, whether the outcome should be in some cases to perpetuate or in other cases to change radically what we are accustomed to say and do.<sup>166</sup>

We know what he has in mind: a reorientation from a watered-down form of liberal Christianity to a truly biblical understanding of the Christian faith, a change from religious relativism to the unique truth of Jesus Christ and a shift from a man-centred missionary action to a theocentric proclamation of the Gospel. That observation comes from a man who spent twelve years on the missions and it is not the observation of a man who has set his face against any form of change.

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166 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 2.

How could he be that kind of a man when he asserts in so many words that "God is the God of history"<sup>167</sup>? Even though the course of human history may be affected by the sinful ways of man, Dr Kraemer holds firm to the conviction that "God has set us in this world to live our life in the different spheres of culture, economics, politics and society so as to find out His Will (...)"<sup>168</sup>. Hence the significance he sees in the signs of the times in which he invites the Church to discern God's will and live in obedience to it. A theology of obedience is not the theology of a man who has made up his mind once for all.

More basically still, to consider Dr Kraemer's ideas of the Christian mission as a frozen vision of evangelism is to ignore the living element he makes out in Christian revelation. God seen in a voluntaristic perspective and a view of the Church's mission that insists on discernment and obedience: these two conceptions find their deeper roots in Dr Kraemer's dynamic understanding of the Christian revelation, which is not to be thought of as a set of creedal tenets or a string of abstract ideas, but as God's free intervention in history through Jesus Christ. That is final and definitive, not in the sense that it is limited and restricted to a point

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167 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 428.

168 Ibid., p. 429.

in time and place to which one has to hark back in exclusive fashion to maintain tradition, but in the sense that God has revealed himself once for all in Jesus Christ and continues to work in history through Jesus Christ who is the head of an eschatological community called the Church.

We have mentioned a colonial period and have thereby alluded to a post-colonial period. How will the changed conditions of the world affect the mission of the Church? We cannot mean that all is likely to change in the Kraemerian vision of that mission. The Church will remain the Church with its divine mandate to witness to Jesus Christ in the world. But how will the ways and means of its witness be affected by secular dechristianization in the West and religious resurgence in the East? It is true also that revelation in Christ will always be the standard by which to judge the non-Christian world. But has that revelation fixed for ever the kind of relations the Church must maintain with the world? Dr Kraemer says the missionary is the point of contact and one may think that he will always remain so. But Dr Kraemer, who worked so hard for the setting up of independent Churches, must have wondered how much and for how long the missionary still fitted in such Churches.

For the time being, let us consider one particular non-Christian religion: Islam. Should one wish to apply to it the vision of the mission described in the above pages,

one would have to take into account a number of special problems. Dr Kraemer sees in Islam a prophetic religion linked to both Christianity and Judaism. In that case the question of points of contact will have to be reconsidered. The missionary will no doubt remain a true point of contact, but how is he to continue "unshaken and undiscouraged even when (his work) is without visible result as, for example, is so largely true in the case of Islam"<sup>169</sup>? And well may he ask himself why it is that Islam will not respond to his efforts. It then becomes obvious that these questions and others like them can only be broached on condition that one is familiar with the culture and religion of the House of Islam.

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<sup>169</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 107.

## CHAPTER III

### A COMPARISON OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

A research concerned with Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to the Muslim world must needs take into account what that writer thought of Islam both as a religion and as a socio-cultural system. However, what is relevant to our purpose is not just any of his ideas on Islam, but only such as have a bearing on Islam considered as the object of the missionary endeavour. Some selection will therefore have to be made between the numerous elements of reflexion contained in Dr Kraemer's writings, from his 1921 thesis on Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw<sup>1</sup> to the unfinished typescript of Islam in a Christian Perspective<sup>2</sup>, which he left at the time of his death in 1965.

In short we are here only interested in Dr Kraemer's ideas on Islam as a non-Christian religion and system. This point of view has nothing unnatural or strained about it. It

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1 Hendrik Kraemer, Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw. Inleiding, vertaling en aanteekeningen, Leiden, P.W.M. Trap, 1921, 239 p. This work is referred to as Een javaansche Primbon.

2 Hendrik Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, unfinished typescript, 271 p., to which must be added 40 sheets of notes and references, Part I: "Historical Sketch of Islam. Origin and Development" and Part II: "Phenomenological Part". This work was to have four parts. At the time of his death in 1965, Dr Kraemer had completed only Parts I and II.

does in fact correspond to our author's own way of looking at Islam, or at any religion for that matter: in his opinion the only correct way of looking at a religion is in the light of theology. That is where he differed for example from a man he very much admired, Prof. W. Brede Kristensen, as he mentions in his introduction to Kristensen's book, The Meaning of Religion<sup>3</sup>. Nor did he agree with those phenomenologists who strove after the pure essence of religion through deductions or inferences based on a distillation of the world's religions.

Dr Kraemer's standard always remained the religion of the Bible as fully revealed in Jesus Christ. His approach was biblical, theological, christological. The near synonymy that Dr Kraemer construed in those three terms can be inferred from his own words in the Preface to Islam in a Christian Perspective:

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<sup>3</sup> In his "Introduction" to W. Brede Kristensen's The Meaning of Religion, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1960, p. xxiv-xxv, Dr Kraemer writes: "His brilliant phenomenological approach leaves the mind with an indelible impression of the seriousness and relevance of Religion; but it offers no way to uncover and tackle such a disturbing problem as that of the perennial ambiguity of Religion. Such a problem can only be really and adequately tackled by a theological approach (...)". Kristensen had been Dr Kraemer's predecessor in the chair of the History and Phenomenology of Religion at the University of Leiden.

The object of this book is therefore after having laid the necessary factual basis in the chapters on the history and phenomenology of Islam, to tackle the subject of the theological evaluation of Islam as a faith, a religion and a way of life, from a christological point of view. One might also say, from a biblical point of view.<sup>4</sup>

When Dr Kraemer outlined the main features of Islam for the readers of The Christian Message in a non-Christian World<sup>5</sup>, he called it "a branch from the prophetic stock of Judaism and Christianity"<sup>6</sup>. This description points to Islam's close relationship with Christianity. In fact, Islam adopted important elements of the Judaic and Christian revelations, and readily acknowledges for its own certain of their teachers, such as Moses and Jesus. However, this relationship is more striking by its points of divergence than by its similarities. Our author had already commented on this in his early writings, Agama Islam<sup>7</sup>, The Christian Message in a non-Christian World and De Islam als godsdienstig-

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4 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 7.

5 Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh-House Press, 1938, p. 215-226. Future references will quote only The Christian Message.

6 Ibid., p. 215. Cf. also p. 142-144.

7 Hendrik Kraemer, Agama Islam, Djilid jang pertama, Bandoeng, Uitgave N.V. v/h A.C. Nix, 1928, 95 p. and Agama Islam, Djilid jang kedoea, Uitgave N.V. Christelijke Boekhandel voor Ned.-Indië, 1933, 119 p.

en als zendingsprobleem<sup>8</sup>. The points made in those publications are hardly different from the conclusions of the later writings including Islam in a Christian Perspective.

The particular views of Dr Kraemer on Islam as a religion both historically and genetically connected with Christianity are not merely based on his looking at that religion as an impartial observer of comparative religion would. We mentioned earlier that these views are conditioned by his conviction that no Christian scholar could adopt a detached attitude when assessing other religions. One must also remember Dr Kraemer's missionary preoccupations: on the one hand, the riddle of Islam's imperviousness to the Gospel and, on the other, his belief that not even the House of Islam is free from the claims of Jesus Christ.

Seen in this light, Dr Kraemer's analysis of the differences where Christianity and Islam would seem to meet assumes a singular importance, not only because it brings out the confusion that threatens the missionary when faced with a faith that insists so much on the unicity of God and professes to be exclusively a religion of revelation, but also because of the danger, to be avoided at all costs in Dr Kraemer's opinion, of basing one's approach to a

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<sup>8</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1938, 48 p., henceforth referred to as De Islam als probleem.

non-Christian religion on misleading points of contact or deceptive elements of continuity. Those are no doubt the main reasons why Dr Kraemer is at pains to describe what keeps Islam and Christianity well apart precisely where their teaching would appear to be the same.

One may also think of another motive. Jesus Christ is the judge of all religions, including Christianity in its empirical forms and historical manifestations. When the author of The Christian Message compares certain key notions of Christianity and Islam, for instance the concepts of God and revelation, he is indeed marking out differences, but at the same time he is throwing theological light on a religion which falls under the judgment of Jesus Christ.

We shall first consider various themes that Christianity and Islam share in common in order better to understand the ethos peculiar to each faith: what links them together and what splits them up. This comparing of themes will help us to understand Dr Kraemer's surprising judgment on Islam as a religion, as we explain in the second section of this study.

#### 1. Common Themes in Islam and Christianity.

Dr Kraemer's understanding of Islam's main religious tenets, for instance its idea of God, revelation, man and the community, shows no major variations over the years. One

may note at times that his tone has lost some of its former harshness and that his sympathy is more outspoken, but on the fundamentals Dr Kraemer shows no willingness to step back. This will become clearer as we survey various notions shared by both Islam and the Christian faith and explain how each religion perceives them.

The concepts we intend to review here are mostly concerned with God, revelation, Jesus Christ, man and sin. Setting forth the Muslim understanding of those elements is not always an easy matter, even if we sum up what Dr Kraemer tells us. Our intention is to stick to what is considered as orthodoxy within Islam, eschewing the complicated scholastic quarrels of mediaeval Islam or those interpretations that still oppose Sunnites to Shiites in the Muslim world. Large sections of Islam in a Christian Perspective are devoted to the treatment of these questions which fall outside the scope of our research.

### God

In an article entitled "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation

entre l'islam et le Christianisme", one may gather from a parenthetical remark how much difference Dr Kraemer sees between Allah and the God of Jesus Christ: "(I say Allah and not God, out of conviction that one must not take Allah for the God of our Lord Jesus Christ)"<sup>9</sup>. It is Islam's rejection of any form of association with and in God that renders it unable to accept the Christian teaching of the Trinity and forces it to interpret that doctrine as a monstrous blasphemy. The process of super-heating that Dr Kraemer detects "in the really religious conceptions of Islam"<sup>10</sup> also applies to the attributes of God, his oneness included. As Dr Kraemer puts it: "Allah in Islam becomes white-hot Majesty, white-hot Omnipotence, white-hot Uniqueness"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme", in Revue de l'évangélisation, Vol. 16, No. 87, janvier-février 1960, p. 7: "(je dis Allah et non Dieu, par conviction qu'il ne faut pas confondre Allah et le Dieu de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ)". We shall be referring to this article as "L'Islam, une religion". In The Christian Message, published in 1938, the author uses both God and Allah indifferently (cf. p. 215-226). In his later writing Islam in a Christian Perspective, he prefers to speak of Allah whenever he refers to the God of Muhammad.

<sup>10</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 221.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. E. Kellerhals in Der Islam, seine Geschichte, seine Lehre, sein Wesen, (zweite, durchgesehene Auflage) Basel, Basler Missionsbuchhandlung, 1956, 403 p., was obviously struck by Dr Kraemer's "white-hot monotheism" to which he refers on p. 64, 147 and 355. Kellerhals in his book follows closely a number of Dr Kraemer's ideas, in particular on God, revelation and the theocratic character of Islam, cf. p. 345-364.

This "one-only" character of the Godhead in Islam is meant primarily as a denial of the gods of heathenism and reflects Muḥammad's fierce preaching in behalf of monotheistic faith among the Bedouin tribes of Arabia. But it also extends to the internal life of God and renders Trinity untenable.

In his last writing, Islam in a Christian Perspective, Dr Kraemer sums up the doctrine of Islam in this matter:

Allah is in the Quranic Kerygma the sole, august, unsurpassable occupant of divinity and therefore the sole legitimate object of worship. He is without any associate or equal (sharīk). Consequently worship of anyone or anything besides Him is the greatest sin, called "shirk" (giving Him a "sharīk"). It is the most heinous form of "Kufr" (unbelief). It makes, beside other reasons, the violent reaction and closedness of the Muslim mind to the Christian trinitarian conception of God understandable.<sup>12</sup>

To convey how deep and instinctive this devotion to "Allah's companionless supereminence"<sup>13</sup> has become for all believers in the House of Islam, Dr Kraemer calls it "a kind of hypnotization", "a monotheistic fascination"<sup>14</sup>.

In order to get a just idea of what is involved in Muslim monotheism, one has only to compare it with its corresponding expression in the Judaic tradition. Both the Koran's Surah 112,1 and the Bible's Deut. 6,5 use the same

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<sup>12</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Semitic word to affirm that there is only one God. But there is a difference, as Dr Kraemer rightly points out:

The monotheism of S.112 is truly monolithic. Allah, the One, the Unequaled stands there erect in his august divine Solitariness. In Deut 6, divine Solitariness is absent. It gets no chance on account of the words immediately following: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." The word "monolithic" is not applicable to this totally different "monotheism".<sup>15</sup>

Koranic monotheism keeps Allah so far away and makes him so self-sufficient that it deeply affects the way Islam looks at God and his relation to man and the world.

#### Providence

This absolute solitariness of God, this "white-hot Majesty, white-hot Omnipotence, white-hot Uniqueness", to recall phrases from The Christian Message<sup>16</sup>, result in a perception sui generis of God's relation to man and conversely, and of God's government of the world. The basic attitude of man in Islam is surrender to Allah with a "quality of absolute ruthlessness"<sup>17</sup> which Dr Kraemer describes as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 164. The verses referred to in Deut. 6 are 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The ideal believer, the abd (or servant, as Islam says), is, so to speak, personified surrender and nothing else. God's Will becomes virtually august divine arbitrariness. To speak of a voluntarist conception of God in Islam is, properly speaking, inexact; one ought to call it a "potentist" conception, if such a word existed.<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to compare how in simpler words our author tries to convey to the Christians of Java the Muslim notion of God's omnipotence. He writes in Agama Islam:

What we must realize is this: in the opinion of Muslims the most sublime of God's attributes is his omnipotence. Allah is indeed an all-powerful Ruler. He does what He likes, He does not have to answer to anybody whomsoever about anything that He does, He does not need the help of anybody and all men are subjected to Him.<sup>19</sup>

Dr Kraemer would later develop this point in his Islam in a Christian Perspective. He thinks that this conception has affected Islam's understanding of the relationship between God and man and the very idea of divine providence. He explains that Muslim consciousness has been moulded by the objective or non-dispositional attributes of Allah: his power, his greatness, his self-sufficiency, etc., so often dwelt upon in the verses of the Koran. He then concludes:

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<sup>18</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 221.

<sup>19</sup> Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 2, p. 74: "Jang haroes kita pahamkan, jaitoe: pada-perasaan orang Moeslim sifat jang termoelia jaitoe Mahakoeasaanja Allah. Allah ialah Pemerintah jang mahakoeasa. Ia melakoekan mana soekanja, Ia tidak oesah memberi penjahoetan kepada siapa djoeapoen tentang barang soeatoe pekerdjaanja, Ia tidak perloe bantoean siapapoen, maka semoea orang terta'aloek kepadanja."

Words like these have led to accentuate in Muslim religious thinking Allah's self-sufficiency as the grandiose expression of His unimaginable and inescapable Greatness, Power and Knowledge. His inscrutable Will and Power occupy in the total picture such a preponderant place that G. von Grunebaum's speaking of the superb impersonalism of Allah (9) touches a real point.<sup>20</sup>

There are however other titles applied to Allah in the Koran. He is spoken of as the 'forgiver', the 'merciful', the 'compassionate'. He is also said to love those who do good and to be their guide. But love for man, as it is manifested for instance in the N.T. in the case of sinners, "is alien to the Quranic Kerygma"<sup>21</sup>. Allah's forgiveness, Dr Kraemer comments,

just as His love extends only to the Believers, not outside the Community or the whole of mankind. Mankind outside the Umma has everything to fear and nothing to hope from Him. The parable of the Prodigal Son f.i. would be entirely incongruous within the Quranic presentation of Allah.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 165. On page 164 Dr Kraemer mentions that the distinction between 'objective' and 'dispositional' names is borrowed from Daud Rahbar's article "Relation of Muslim Theology to the Qur'ān", in The Muslim World, Vol. 51, No. 1, January 1961, p. 44-49. Note (9) in the above quotation refers to page 221 of G. von Grunebaum's book, Medieval Islam. A Study in Cultural Orientation, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1947, vii-365 p.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The frequency with which the terms 'merciful' and 'compassionate' recur in the Koran - in fact at the beginning of all chapters but one - does not modify the general impression of "lofty aloofness and solitariness" left by a reading of that book<sup>23</sup>. Dr Kraemer goes even as far as saying that

"Mercy" and "compassion" have no intrinsic but an occasional place in Allah's image. Significantly in the orthodox doctrine of God of "Kalām" they therefore got no place.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the prominence given to Allah's power has had the result of stressing the inescapable character of his decrees and led to a very deterministic kind of predestination in Muslim theology. This is a matter for wonder, as Dr Kraemer feels that "the conflicting data in the Quran certainly do not compel to this strong determinism"<sup>25</sup>.

This last observation points to an important distinction between the theological elements to be found in the Koran and the theology embodied in the Kalām. Theological developments have not always been favourable to the Koran. On the question of God's relation to man and the world, Dr Kraemer opines that orthodox theology has rendered Islam

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23 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 167.

24 Ibid. Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

25 Ibid.

a disservice,

for in the light of the various data on Allah in the Quran this doctrine of God is an image of Allah, that represents an amputation of the Quranic image.<sup>26</sup>

Muslim theology has so much insisted on "Allah's unilateral determination of good and evil"<sup>27</sup>, on his "absolute inaccountability" (sic)<sup>28</sup>, that it "has never developed a real doctrine of divine Providence, though undoubtedly in the Quran elements for it are to be found (...)"<sup>29</sup>. In the framework of official theology there exists no possibility of a religious dialogue between God and man, or of man with God who, as Dr Kraemer says, "is by definition uncontestable and whom to contend is a religious absurdity and injury"<sup>30</sup>.

From these few remarks on God and his providence as they are apprehended by Islam, one grasps the full import of Dr Kraemer's evaluation of Christian and Muslim monotheism.

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26 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 167.

27 Ibid., p. 169.

28 Ibid., p. 170.

29 Ibid. Kraemer further explains that if Islam knows of divine Providence, this has been brought about not by Muslim theology, but by the mystical movement known as Sufism (ibid.). He adds in note 15, "In saying that Muslim theology has never developed a real doctrine of Providence, I mean just that. In the life of faith, led by the ordinary believers, a simple trust in Allah's Providence, undoubtedly is a reality" (ibid., underlined by Dr Kraemer).

30 Ibid.

Their apprehension of the one God, he says, is "so different that they live and move in a strongly divergent religious universe"<sup>31</sup>.

### Revelation

The distinct religious universes in which Islam and Christianity move come out in sharper relief in their respective understanding of revelation. Islam is a religion of revelation. This Dr Kraemer emphasizes whenever he speaks about Islam, whether in his early writings such as The Christian Message, in later articles published in the sixties, or in the great work which he left unfinished. The centrality of revelation for Islam is underscored in these words of Dr Kraemer's:

In the most emphatic sense of the word Islam is a religion of revelation. Wahj, revelation, is the pivot on which it turns, and one of the central themes of its theological thinking.<sup>32</sup>

In the first years of his ministry, which he spent at Mecca, Muhammad declared that he was nothing but Allah's envoy and the conveyer of his words. These were consigned to writing and eventually became known as the Koran. Islam immediately regarded that book as its most treasured possession. Our author again explains why:

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31 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 157.

32 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217.

The Quran, the collection of God's words made known to Muhammad, is thus the immutable word of God. Islam has rightly sensed and still senses that this book is the sole foundation for its claim to be an independent, to be the universal, God-given and ultimate word of God.<sup>33</sup>

It can be seen that revelation forges a link between the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But this link goes deeper than the mere formal possession of the same theological concept. The connexion is tighter owing to the many elements the Koran borrowed from the Judaic and Christian scriptures, and further because of the continuity that the founder of Islam saw in the three revelations. This important fact is emphasized by Dr Kraemer:

(...) the real point for him was not that he became the Bringer of a new Revelation, a new "Book", but of an Arabic version from the Celestial Source-Book, just as the already existing "Books" of Jews and Christians had there their origin.<sup>34</sup>

Although it may have been Muhammad's intention to provide his fellow Arabs with a revelation of their own, similar to that of the Christians and the Jews with whom he had been in contact, revelation in Muslim theology has taken a meaning quite different from what Dr Kraemer understands by Christian revelation. Likewise, the significance of the

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<sup>33</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217.  
Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>34</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 47.  
Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

Koran to a Muslim has little in common with that seen in the Bible by the Christian faith, although both the Muslim and the Christian believer regard their respective scriptures as sacred writings. The difference of perspective has been compressed by Dr Kraemer into a terse and lapidary formula: "The foundation of Islam is not, The Word became flesh. It is, The Word became book"<sup>35</sup>, or again into the felicitous expressions of his article on "L' Islam, une religion":

In the confrontation between Islam and Christianity, one perceives that for the former Revelation is a book, whereas for the latter it is a person, that of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup>

This difference is not a matter of immediate evidence and Dr Kraemer observes that one becomes aware of its decisive character only after years of study and experience in the field of the encounter between Islam and the Christian faith. According to him no other religion offers the example of such veneration for a sacred book. Nowhere is a holy writ taken so literally as the infallible word of God, to such an extent

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<sup>35</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217-218. Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, Why Christianity of All Religions?, London, Lutterworth Press, 1962, p. 61-62: "For Islam the revelation is the book of the revelation, the Koran; it came straight from heaven and its sole author is God Himself. In Christianity the revelation is the Person of Jesus Christ; it is the Bible only in a secondary sense - and the Bible is the work of a large number of different people."

<sup>36</sup> Kraemer, "L' Islam, une religion", p. 34: "Dans la confrontation Islam-Christianisme, on constate que pour le premier, la Révélation est un livre, pour le second, une personne, celle de Jésus-Christ."

that the doctrine of the uncreated origin and pre-existence of the Koran is valid Muslim doctrine to this day. In Islam in a Christian Perspective Dr Kraemer goes into long developments in order to impress upon his eventual reader how much the Koran means to a Muslim. He writes for instance:

The axiomatic certitude then that in the Quran Revelation is embodied in the most absolutized form that is imaginable, is the real glory of Islam. The possession of this unsurpassable entity guarantees the superior place of the Umma among the Religions of the world, and the sincere exaltation about this eminent privilege has made Revelation as embodied in the Quran into a category of its own in isolated grandeur, comparable with the lofty isolated grandeur of Allah in His unapproachable Majesty.<sup>37</sup>

There are foreseeable consequences to this "absolutization"<sup>38</sup> of the Koran. For one thing, the House of Islam looks with disfavour on any attempt to translate it, since the language itself is part of the revealed contents of the book. Much more damaging is the kind of fundamentalism that arose from this devotion to the Koran. Christian fundamentalism as we know it, Dr Kraemer says, is nothing compared to Islamic fundamentalism: Christian fundamentalists

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37 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 192-193. Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

38 Ibid., p. 193.

are "only small children"<sup>39</sup>.

For this reason he does not hesitate to speak of 'fossilization', a term he uses in The Christian Message. There lies for him the main difference between the two apprehensions of revelation: the mechanical and static understanding of revelation in Islam over against the dynamic self-communication of God in biblical realism. This is how Dr Kraemer sums up that difference:

The Islamic idea of revelation is widely different from revelation in Biblical realism. The idea of revelation is there, even in a very rigid form, but in comparison with revelation in Biblical realism, it has become externalized, fossilized as it were. Revelation in Biblical realism means, God constantly acting in holy sovereign freedom, conclusively embodied in the man Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Twenty-five years later Dr Kraemer had not felt it necessary to revise his assessment of the Muslim doctrine of

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<sup>39</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch", in Neue Begegnung von Kirche und Islam, ed. by W. Holsten, Stuttgart, Evang. Missionsverlag, 1960, p. 25: "Der Islam hat einen Typus des Fundamentalismus entwickelt, im Vergleich zu dem die christlichen Fundamentalisten nur kleine Kinder sind". Also in "L'Islam, une religion", p. 8: "The Christian fundamentalism that we know is nothing compared with Islamic fundamentalism" (Le fondamentalisme chrétien que nous connaissons n'est rien en comparaison du fondamentalisme islamique). Note that Holsten's book includes two essays on Islam by Dr Kraemer: the one just referred to, p. 15-27 and "Die Lage der islamischen Welt und die christliche Kirche", p. 28-36. These two articles, which form a whole, are referred to by the single title of "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" in future quotations.

<sup>40</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217.

revelation. Although he seems to have discarded the word 'fossilization' in Islam in a Christian Perspective, he still insists on the mechanical understanding of koranic revelation. He maintains that

the deep concern in Islam for establishing the exceptional position of the Quran, by which it was made proof against all doubt and emulation, has unfortunately resulted in a mechanical, undynamic conception of revelation. Literalism was the only choice.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 196. For all his insistence on how much Christian revelation differs from Muslim revelation, Dr Kraemer had little success with those who did not approve of his biblical approach. A.C. Bouquet in The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions, Welwyn, England, James Nisbet, 1958, p. 401, after discussing Dr Kraemer's understanding of divine revelation, exclaims: "But this is not New Testament Christianity at all. This is Islam ('It shall be as Allah pleases')." For Prof. A.R. Gualtieri, Theological Evaluations by Christians of the Religious Faith of Non-Christians, Unpublished Dissertation for the Ph.D., Department of Divinity, McGill University, Montreal, 1969, p. 154: "Such a view is highly reminiscent of the predominant Muslim conception of the Qur'anic revelation." In his book At Sundry Times. An Essay in the Comparison of Religions, London, Faber and Faber, 1958, R.C. Zaehner, after referring to Dr Kraemer's views, comments, p. 198-199: "(...) if ever there were a case for 'Biblical realism', it is that of Islam, not of Christianity." E.G. Parrinder in Comparative Religion, London, G. Allen and Unwin, 1962, is not too kind when dealing with Dr Kraemer, p. 48-51, and shows his mettle with the following words: "The claim of Islam is just as sweeping as that of any Calvinist, and its doctrine of predestination brings it strangely parallel to that Christian heresy", ibid., p. 49.

Jesus

When one comes to a comparison of the teaching of the Christian faith on its founder Jesus Christ and the way the Koran looks at him, one becomes fully aware of the unbridgeable chasm that keeps the two worlds of Islam and Christianity irremediably estranged. The question of Jesus Christ is not, however, treated ex professo either in The Christian Message or in Islam in a Christian Perspective. Still, when Dr Kraemer deals at length on the significance of Allah as portrayed in the Koran, some of the points he raises inevitably touch upon the person of Jesus and the claims of Christianity in his regard. What he says may be summed up as follows: the trinitarian idea is absolutely foreign to the Koran and to think of Allah as having a son is sheer blasphemy.

In his shorter articles on Islam, one finds a few remarks on this point. In "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" for instance, in a list of the classic misunderstandings between Islam and Christianity, he mentions first of all the person of Jesus Christ and his cross<sup>42</sup>.

One may also refer to the article on "L' Islam, une religion", which presents the Jesus of the Koran as a wonder

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42 Cf. "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 24.

worker who frequently performed miracles<sup>43</sup>. Jesus is also called nabi with special respect, although it is denied that he is the son of God<sup>44</sup>. He was not crucified, as Allah substituted someone else in his place<sup>45</sup>. Muslims believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus and Mary is treated with exceptional reverence in the Koran<sup>46</sup>.

This interesting material already affords a glimpse into the gulf that separates Islam from Christianity regarding the person of Jesus Christ. However the crux of the matter lies deeper still and can be grasped fully only if one remembers how Islam comprehends revelation. This point is explained as follows by Dr Kraemer:

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43 Cf. Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 30.

44 Cf. Ibid.

45 Cf. Ibid., p. 31.

46 Cf. Ibid., p. 33.

On the Christian side, revelation is about the self-communication of God in the incarnation and humanity of Jesus Christ and about God's self-surrender on behalf of mankind, about the true solution to the question of how to mend relations between God and man. For Islam on the contrary revelation means an infallible book, and in this infallible book the whole interpretation of revelation as self-communication and self-giving of God in the historical appearance of Jesus Christ is already a blasphemy; thereby one expects of God something which is inconceivable for Muslim religious thinking.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever teaching on Jesus Christ Christianity and Islam may have in common, it stands to reason that such teaching provides no true point of contact between the two religions. The differences are not only radical, but from a Muslim's point of view they are simply irreducible since the Koran cannot be mistaken in his presentation of Jesus the Messiah: it is the Christians who misunderstand the true character of the Prophet Jesus. In that perspective comparisons only sharpen the divergences. Dr Kraemer, for his part, has little time for them and, faithful to himself,

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<sup>47</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 25: "Auf christlicher Seite handelt es sich in der Offenbarung um die Selbstmitteilung Gottes in Jesu Christi Fleischwerdung, Menschwerdung, und um die Selbsthingabe Gottes für die Menschheit, um die wirkliche Lösung der Frage der Wiederherstellung der Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch. Für den Islam dagegen bedeutet Offenbarung ein unfehlbares Buch, und in diesem unfehlbaren Buch ist die ganze Auffassung der Offenbarung als Selbstmitteilung und Selbsthingabe Gottes in der historischen Erscheinung Jesu Christi schon eine Blasphemie; man mutet da Gott etwas zu, was für das religiöse Denken eines Moslems unvollziehbar ist."

insists that such comparisons

as themes of a true dialogue create only confusion. The Muslim believer will immediately object to you - and from his point of view he is perfectly right - the undeniable truth of the word of God.<sup>48</sup>

### Man

There is little need to enlarge further on the picture of Jesus offered by the Korah or by Muslim theology in general. For Dr Kraemer the religious problem of man's relation with God is even more informative when studying Islam as a religion and assessing its basic discrepancies with the teaching of the Christian faith.

The subject of Islam's anthropology always crops up in the various writings where Dr Kraemer considers the religious aspects of Islam. His final verdict is trenchant: Islam has no anthropology. He writes in The Christian Message that "it is significant to note that in Moslem theology there is hardly anything that could be reasonably called anthropology"<sup>49</sup>. Later, as he was writing the draft of

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<sup>48</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 31: "Il est utile de savoir ce que le Coran dit sur ces sujets pour connaître les idées musulmanes; mais, comme thèmes d'un vrai dialogue, ils ne créent que confusion. Le croyant musulman vous oppose immédiatement - et de son point de vue il a parfaitement raison - la vérité indéniable de la parole de Dieu."

<sup>49</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 218.

Islam in a Christian Perspective, he would again insist on this deficiency of Islam. His observations on man in the Koran begin with this general appreciation of Muslim theology:

The all-pervading theocentricity of Islam is the main reason that "Kalām" has concentrated its chief interest on this central aspect and has never developed a real doctrine of man.<sup>50</sup>

There are nevertheless a great number of references to man in the Koran. What is stressed there, however, "is man's utter dependence on Allah and His will to guide him to blessedness or to perdition"<sup>51</sup>. Men are even created believers and unbelievers. Although "Allah has breathed in man from His Spirit"<sup>52</sup>, the Devil is at work on him: hence man's many failures and his resistance in front of God<sup>53</sup>. Still, the picture of man presented by the Koran is not all negative: he is the noblest of creatures and Allah has subjected everything to him<sup>54</sup>.

But in the Koran men are never God's children: Allah deals only with servants. This Dr Kraemer underlines in an important note of his last writing which develops an idea he had already used in The Christian Message:

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50 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 171.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., p. 172.

53 Cf. Ibid.

54 Cf. Ibid., p. 173.

This energetic rejection of the symbol of the Father-Child-image for (sic: for?) the relationship between God and man, has of course great consequences for the Muslim apprehension of God and man's relationship to Him. In the Quran it is a consequence of the abhorrence from likening the "Unequaled" with intimate human relationships (S.112), implied in His monolithic, solitary Oneness. The polemic against a misunderstanding of the Trinity, which is also behind it, is in this context only secondary.<sup>55</sup>

Here again it must be observed that the Koran contains elements which orthodox Muslim theology has neglected, not only because of the "unilateral prominence of the doctrine of God"<sup>56</sup>, but also because the doctrine of man as outlined by Muhammad in the Koran is too fragmentary, being, as Dr Kraemer explains, "reproduced either from outside sources as a means to impress his hearers, or from his experience of their negative response to his appeal"<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 172, note 19; cf. The Christian Message, p. 222. In his doctoral dissertation on Man in the Qur'an, Amsterdam, Drukkerij Holland N.V., 1965, p. 161, D. Bakker refers to Dr Kraemer's assertions in The Christian Message, p. 222: "Man has no real place in the relation of God and man" and "fellowship does not exist between God and man", and concludes that this "does not do justice to the total picture which we found about this in the Qur'an." Cf. also R.M. Speight, "Some Bases for a Christian Apologetic to Islam", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 54, No. 2, April 1965, p. 193-205 and J.M.S. Baljon, "De liefde Gods in de Koran", in Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift, Vol. 16 (1961/62), No. 5, June 1962, p. 337-343.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Whatever the reasons why in Muslim teaching "man only appears as an appendix to Allah's all-disposing power"<sup>58</sup>, the Koran itself is far from devoid of references to sin, repentance and the need for forgiveness. Yet, in the doctrinal development of Islam, Dr Kraemer is forced to the conclusion that these references "remain somehow incoherent and do not acquire a place of central significance"<sup>59</sup>.

Regarding the religious anthropology of Islam, Dr Kraemer had already referred in The Christian Message to the crucial question of man's salvation. He wrote:

There is hardly any surmise, either in the Quran or in its standard theologies, about the stirring problems of God and man that are involved in the terms of sin and salvation. The whole drama of salvation between God and the world, so vivid in Biblical realism, from which Islam, historically speaking, is an offshoot, is entirely absent.<sup>60</sup>

How does then Islam picture man's existential relation to God? According to Dr Kraemer,

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<sup>58</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 174.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 218. Cf. Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 33: "Both in the Bible and in the Koran man is God's creature. But the Bible lays the stress on the idea of the new creature in Christ, the Koran on compulsory obedience of man such as he is" (L'homme est une créature de Dieu dans le Coran et dans la Bible. Mais la Bible accentue la notion de la nouvelle créature en Christ, le Coran l'obéissance obligatoire de l'homme tel qu'il est).

Obedience in surrender to the God of Omnipotence is the core of Islam. This accounts for the strangely eventless relation between God and man that characterizes Islam.<sup>61</sup>

In this matter of man's relation to God Islam's position and Christian teaching stand poles apart when this relation is seen in the light of biblical realism, as Dr Kraemer explains:

Obedience in fellowship with the God of Holy Love is the core of Biblical realism and accounts for the peculiarly eventful relation between God and man that characterizes Biblical revelation.<sup>62</sup>

### Sin

The "obedience in surrender" mentioned above defines what is in fact a true Muslim. But how should this obedience be understood? In a purely formal way, as the external fulfilment of legal prescriptions, or in an existential way, as springing from the assent of the heart? In other words, in all religions at some point or other obedience and observance raise, or should raise, the problem of the relation between faith and works in the process of salvation.

In Agama Islam Dr Kraemer tries to explain this difficult point to the Christians of the Dutch East Indies. He refers to the various controversies that arose in Christianity as well as in Islam on the relation between faith and works and writes:

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<sup>61</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 218-219.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

Amongst the Christians the central point of the differences in opinion on works and faith was this question: how can man arrive at the certitude that he has been reconciled with the Lord God? As for the Muslims, the core of the differences was this question: what must be the touchstone to determine whether a man is a true Muslim?<sup>63</sup>

In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer notes that this problem merely became in Islam a question "of the relation between inward and outward conformity to Islam as a religious, social and political community"<sup>64</sup>. The matter was never considered from the purely religious point of view, but always included political implications, as was to be expected "in accordance with Islam's fundamental religious-political character"<sup>65</sup>. As a result, a query such as "Who is a true Muslim?" admits of a simple legalistic definition in which the notion of sin does not go beyond that of the violation

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<sup>63</sup> Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 2, p. 63: "Dikalangan Maséhi poesatnja perselisihan pikiran tentang amal dan iman, jaitoe pertanjaan ini: bagaimanakah manoesia mendapat kejakinan bahwa ia soedah didamaikan dengan Toehan Allah? Dikalangan Islam poesatnja perselisihan itoe, jaitoe soal ini: apakah jang haroes mendjadi batoe-oedji akan menentoekan kemoeslimannja barang seorang?" Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>64</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 219. It may be noted that in The Christian Message the question of faith and works is raised not only for Islam, but also for other great religions, such as Hinduism (p. 168-173) and Buddhism (p. 177-181). For Dr Kraemer the problem of the relation between faith and works is a fundamental one in the Christian faith, cf. The Christian Message, p. 74-75.

<sup>65</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 175.

of legal prescriptions. The harm inflicted upon man's personal relationship with God finds no echo in that conception. There lies the essential difference between the Christian and the Muslim doctrine of sin.

Dr Kraemer concludes that this very difference prevents one from seeing in Islam a soteriological religion. Sin understood in the Christian sense "as the wall of separation between God and man"<sup>66</sup> is unknown to Muslim theology. It is the mark of a religion of salvation that it "proclaims to overcome a fundamental rupture between God and man"<sup>67</sup>. Islam does not know of such fundamental rupture.

A legalistic conception of sin is even seen by Muslim apologists as an extra argument in favour of Islam. In a note Dr Kraemer refers to the Muslims' broad notion of sin and writes:

This latitudinarianism (sic) is to general Muslim feeling a plus for Islam, a sign of moral health and liberation. Especially in comparison with Christianity. Christian conception of sin and forgiveness are felt as an unhealthy "obsession" by sin.<sup>68</sup>

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66 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 175.

67 Ibid. Cf. Kraemer, Why Christianity of All Religions?, p. 105: "Islam is certainly no religion of deliverance or redemption; nor indeed could it be so, because the revelation which it brings is not a self-communication on the part of Allah, but a Law, informing men of Allah's commands and interdicts."

68 Ibid., note 22.

Admittedly the problem of sin is but one aspect of a moral teaching which concerns itself with all human acts. Morality extends to more positive matters such as the question of human goodness, which in Christianity often goes by the name of moral perfection. In his article on "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" Dr Kraemer outlines how Islam looks at the ideal of religious righteousness. There is no real tension, he writes, between perfection and the fact of human failure, no grieving over the riddle of man's vain efforts. With much sensibleness, it would appear, "one puts up with it as a hard fact of human life, as the limitation for which the compassion of God provides"<sup>69</sup>. And drawing upon his personal experience with Muslim missionaries from India, he refers to their comment on Jesus' invitation to his disciples to be perfect like their Father in heaven. This, they argue, is arrant nonsense, which just goes to show how much more reasonable and realistic Muhammad was than Jesus<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 22: "Es gibt im Islam also nicht eine wirkliche Spannung zwischen Vollkommenheit und menschlichem Versagen, und man leidet nicht an dem Rätsel des menschlichen Versagens; man nimmt es als ein Faktum des menschlichen Lebens hin, als den Mangel, für den die Barmherzigkeit Gottes eintritt."

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Ibid.

Prophethood

As mentioned earlier Dr Kraemer saw in Islam one of the great prophetic religions together with Christianity and Judaism. This trait by itself would justify looking into the notion of prophecy in Islam. But other reasons as well warrant our attention. There is the centrality of Muhammad in the Muslim creed, a centrality which is parallel to that of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith and is ignored by too many Christian theologians, even amongst the well-informed. There is further the conviction amongst Muslims that Muhammad is not only a prophet standing in the continuity of God's special messengers, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, but also their final successor, the seal of the prophets, the Lord of all Apostles, as Muslim theology calls him<sup>71</sup>. For all these reasons Dr Kraemer considers the question of prophethood a sensitive area in the confrontation between Islam and Christianity<sup>72</sup>.

In Islam in a Christian Perspective the paramount importance of this question for Muslim doctrine is clearly stated as for example when Dr Kraemer writes:

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 186-188.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 30; "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 24.

Conform (sic) to the "Shahāda", the basis (sic) Islamic witness to Allah, the sole, true God, and to Muhammad, the final Apostle of God, Muslim theology and piety know only two main fields of theological reflection: the "ilāhiyyāt" and the "nubuwwiyyāt" (the questions regarding Allah and prophethood). In this prophetology Muhammad, the final prophet, occupies of course the central place.<sup>73</sup>

Our only concern in this chapter is to find out from Dr Kraemer how much the Muslim conception of a prophet differs from that of Christianity. Actually what emerges from Dr Kraemer's analysis is an assessment of the Muhammad phenomenon as a prophet both in the Koran and in later developments of Muslim doctrine rather than an explicit weighing of differences. However, from our author's writings one can gather the following.

If one sets the prophethood of Muhammad against the picture that develops from a study of the Old Testament, one cannot but agree that Muhammad does not fit in with the model embodied in the greater prophets of the Judaic tradition. According to Dr Kraemer, who borrows from biblical scholars and theologians, scriptural prophecy carries with it four characteristics: the conviction that one is being called and sent by God; the realization that through prophecy one is interpreting the will of God; the emphasis laid on God's intervention in human affairs; and finally the fact that the

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73 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 177.

prophet does not think of himself as part of the message<sup>74</sup>.

A careful study of Muhammad's career leads one to the conclusion that the founder of Islam meets only partly, if at all, the requisites of a prophet according to the Scriptures. Or, to put it in another way, one must draw a distinction in Muhammad between the prophet of Mecca and the prophet of Medina. In both cases there are facets of his prophetic experience that tell him from the great prophets of the Old Testament.

During his ministry at Mecca in the teeth of disbelief and opposition, Muhammad sought his only warrant in the book he had brought. This he put forward as the ultimate touchstone of the truth of his claims. In Islam in a Christian Perspective Dr Kraemer comments on this singular character of the Prophet's preaching. He writes:

The passionate defence of his prophetic vocation and of his "Book" in many controversial encounters with the unbelieving Mekkans, in his first stage, shows that to him not his experiences of inspiration and revelation were the sure signs of his true prophethood, but the "Book", the "tanzil", which he brought, was his irrefutable legitimation.<sup>75</sup>

Dr Kraemer further adds that history affords no other example of such vehemence in the defence of one's own prophetic calling and the divine authenticity of one's book.

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74 Cf. Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 177.

75 Ibid., p. 178.

If one considers the second stage of Muhammad's ministry, one again becomes aware of differences. Whereas in the first part of his life, that is to say the years he spent in Mecca forecasting the day of doom and urging the people to the adoration of the one true God, Muhammad had been content to be "a mere prophet"<sup>76</sup>, when he had moved to Medina he became at the same time the religious, political and military leader of the community that had yielded to his call.

These considerations prompt Dr Kraemer to conclude that it is best to regard Muhammad's prophetic career, not as a parallel of the calling heard by the great prophets of the Old Testament, but on a par with other examples of charismatic leadership such as occur now and again in the course of history<sup>77</sup>.

Dr Kraemer casts no doubts on the subjective sincerity and psychological continuity of Muhammad's charismatic role. He points, however, to an objective discontinuity between the prophet at Mecca and the political leader at Medina. He thinks this is "what constitutes in the light of the phenomenology of the great biblical prophets the disturbing problem"<sup>78</sup>

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76 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 178.

77 Cf. Ibid.

78 Ibid., p. 180a.

about Muhammad's prophethood and he surmises that "this riddle in Muhammad's prophetic personality has therefore engendered the riddle of Islam"<sup>79</sup>.

The pre-eminence that the figure of the Prophet gradually acquired in the House of Islam in the course of its historical growth was furthered by the doctrinal importance bestowed on his Sunna. It also profited by "the constant presence of the Christians and the confrontations with them and their claims for Christ"<sup>80</sup>. Dr Kraemer sums up Muhammad's position within Islam as follows: "He has become for the Muslim not only the receiver and transmitter of the Koran, but also the exemplary leader and model of the Umma"<sup>81</sup>.

The Prophet's superexcellence and finality together with his strictures upon Christians and Jews alike for allegedly falsifying their scriptures may explain, Dr Kraemer thinks, the lack of interest displayed by Muslim theology for the other prophets so often mentioned in the Koran. Theologians are not in the least curious about what kind of relation

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<sup>79</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 180b.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>81</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 24: "(...) der für den Moslem nicht nur der Empfänger und Überbringer des Koran, sondern auch der vorbildhafte Führer und das Vorbild der Umma geworden ist."

links those other prophets and their books to their own Prophet and the book of Islam<sup>82</sup>. There has not therefore grown in Muslim doctrine a prophetology that could have had for its basis the numerous data offered by the Koran<sup>83</sup>.

### Eschatology

The question of eschatology is not raised in Dr Kraemer's earlier writings, for instance in The Christian Message or in De Islam als probleem where the attention centres very much on the theocratic ideal of the Muslim community. In one of his later articles, however, our author mentions eschatology as one of the important points on which Islam differs from Christianity. He underlines the eschatological contents of Muhammad's early preaching and tells us that this trend soon disappeared from the later revelations. As regards popular Islam he also remarks that there are preserved in it many eschatological strands. But these, he writes,

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82 Cf. Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 188.

83 Cf. Ibid., p. 189.

have not really acquired official status in the doctrine itself of Islam. Its orthodox eschatology conveys the expectations of Islam's victory rather than looking forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God in the sense of the Gospel.<sup>84</sup>

These are but short notes. In his last writing Dr Kraemer spends more time on the subject of eschatology and Islam. He draws our attention to four theological loci for a study of Muslim eschatology: Muḥammad's initial preaching at Mecca, his later preaching after he had moved to Medina, the teaching of orthodox theology and finally the popular religion of Islam.

As regards Muḥammad's early career Dr Kraemer writes that its outstanding feature was "its eschatological character"<sup>85</sup>. Here is how he summarizes the Prophet's preaching during that first period:

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<sup>84</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 32-33: "L'Islam populaire conserve beaucoup d'éléments eschatologiques, mais ceux-ci n'ont pas vraiment acquis droit de cité dans la doctrine même de l'Islam. Son eschatologie orthodoxe exprime plus l'attente de la victoire de l'Islam que celle de la venue du Royaume de Dieu au sens évangélique."

<sup>85</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, Part I, Chapter II, p. 24.

The Resurrection of the Dead, the terrors and anxieties of Doomsday, the horrors of Hell and the sensual bliss of Paradise, the inescapability and inexorability of the all-decisive Hour, its menacing nearness and therefore the thundering appeal to repent and make ready, to save one's soul from damnation in the severe rendering of account that was pending, were the themes hurled with impassioned insistence at the heads of the worldly, sceptical Mekkans.<sup>86</sup>

It may come as a surprise that the weight of this preaching bears not on God's oneness, but on his judgment to come. Dr Kraemer draws our attention to this informative detail when he writes:

Allah as Creator and above all as Judge looms large in these first religious representations, but the preaching of Allah's Unity, that is to say the monotheistic emphasis as such which is the main tenor of Islam, is not at all prominent yet.<sup>87</sup>

In this matter the influence of Christianity on Muḥammad's preaching cannot be denied. Together with other orientalists that have studied the question, - Tor Andrae and K. Ahrens are quoted - Dr Kraemer is convinced that "Christian motives have played a role in the growth of his vocational consciousness"<sup>88</sup>. He was in particular "seized in the depth of his being by the Christian idea of divine judgment"<sup>89</sup>.

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86 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 24. (Ch.II)

87 Ibid., p. 25.

88 Ibid., p. 24.

89 Ibid., p. 25.

The Medina period of the Prophet's life was soon absorbed by other cares and worries. It was a time marked by military conquest and political consolidation. At that juncture Dr Kraemer speaks of "a distinct difference and discontinuity in the level of Muḥammad's religious and moral discernment" which is implied "by his initial 'world-denial' and his later emphatic 'world-affirmation'"<sup>90</sup>. A most telling effect of this change in the Prophet's attitude was the ensuing mutation in the community's objectives. To quote again from Islam in a Christian Perspective:

the inchoate theocratic Umma grew up, that was not any longer an eschatological community, but one directed towards worldly conquest, power and success as the sign of its superior religious truth and value.<sup>91</sup>

If we now turn with Dr Kraemer to the theology of Islam, we find out that it has elaborated "a purely individualistic eschatology of the Last Things"<sup>92</sup>. The religious self-consciousness of Islam has been more deeply and enduringly affected by the second period of Muḥammad's life than by his early ministry at Mecca. This is reflected in its official theology which knows of no eschatology in the line of the New Testament. The historical logic of this

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90 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 180b.

91 Ibid., p. 181. Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

92 Ibid., p. 263. Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

development is conveyed in this remark by Dr Kraemer: "Just as the Quran Muslim theology is, as already said, absolutely silent on a Kingdom of God and a totally new world-order"<sup>93</sup>.

To this day the religious ethos of the Muslim world is dominated by "this mundane-theocratic perspective of Islam"<sup>94</sup>. This comes out clearly enough in the opinion of those many Muslims who think that the present problems of Islam must be explained by "the loss of its ancient glory and power"<sup>95</sup> and who would see a solution of the religious crisis in some restoration of its former splendour.

#### The community

In his writings Dr Kraemer devotes a lot of attention to the Muslim community. Not only does he see in the particular ideology of that community one of the basic traits of the Prophet's religion, but in his opinion the differences that separate Islam and Christianity stand out most clearly in their respective understanding of the religious community. This is probably the point on which he insists most in his Agama Islam. Here is how he explains the fundamental character of Islam to the Christian teachers and leaders of Java:

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93 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 263.

94 Ibid., p. 181.

95 Ibid.

At first at Mecca the Prophet Muhammad founded a community of faithful who believed in the One Lord God and in the Prophet Muhammad, the Bringer of God's Word. But after moving to Medina the Prophet Muhammad changed the principles of his behaviour. Actually it is at Medina that the religion of Islam became a political body. At Medina the Prophet Muhammad changed "the religion of Islam" into "the kingdom of Islam". The words of the Lord Jesus which say: "My kingdom is not a kingdom of the world" clash with the principles of Islam. At Medina the Prophet Muhammad was not only the Bringer of God's Word, but also a head of state, a legislator and a commander-in-chief.<sup>96</sup>

In The Christian Message our author calls the Muslim community one of the two components that make up the core of Islam<sup>97</sup>. In a similar vein he maintains in his last writing that "the real ground pattern of authentic Islam is, undoubtedly, the religious-political Umma that grew under Muhammad's leadership and prophetic guidance in Medina"<sup>98</sup>.

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96 Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 1, p. 34: "Moela-moela di-Mekah Nabi Moehammad mengadakan djoem'at orang beriman, jang pertjaja akan Toehan Allah jang Esa dan akan Nabi Moehammad, Pembawa Sabda Allah itoe. Tetapi sedjak pindahnja ke-Medina, Nabi Moehammad mengoebahkan azas kelakoeannja. Pada hakékatnja di-medinalah agama Islam itoe mendjadi badan politik. Di-Medina Nabi Moehammad mengoebahkan "agama Islam" mendjadi "keradjaan Islam". Perkataan Toehan 'Isa boenjinja: "Keradjaankoe boekan keradjaan doeniawi" bertentangan dengan azas Islam. Di-Medina Nabi Moehammad boekan sadja Pembawa Sabda Allah atau Nabi, melaikan djoega kepala pemerintah negeri, pengarang oendang-oendang dan Panglima perang besar."

97 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 220 and 222.

98 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 158.

As Dr Kraemer explains in The Christian Message, this community is a theocracy, that is to say it is "ruled by the Law of God and His Apostle"<sup>99</sup>. In his brochure on Islam als probleem, we are reminded that this theocratic ideal Islam owes to the Jewish and Christian influences that contributed to its birth<sup>100</sup>. It was from the very first, so native to Islam that it made that religion into "the most resolute and most persevering effort of mankind towards the realization on earth of a completely elaborated theocracy"<sup>101</sup>.

The point to remember, however, is that this theocracy is not a purely religious system: it is also a "political and a social unit"<sup>102</sup>. The practical implications of this conception for Islam are developed by Dr Kraemer in his later writings, in particular World Cultures and World Religions and Islam in a Christian Perspective. In this last work he devotes a full chapter to "The Theocratic Character of Islam"<sup>103</sup>,

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99 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 222.

100 Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 12: "De Islam wil een theocratie zijn, krachtens zijn Joodsch en Christelijk-geïnspireerde afkomst."

101 Ibid., p. 15: "De Islam is de meest-resolute en langst-volgehouden poging der mensheid een tot in alle onderdeelen uitgewerkte theocratie op aarde te verwerkelijken."

102 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 222.

103 Cf. Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 208-223.

where he speaks of the "theocratic, or better, nomocratic self-understanding of the Umma"<sup>104</sup> and points to its emergence in "the wider world as a religious-political body, in which the religious and the political were united in inseparable, indistinguishable symbiosis"<sup>105</sup>.

When Dr Kraemer uses the term 'nomocratic' he wishes to convey the importance of the law in the religious consciousness of the Umma. The Religious Law (Shari'a) occupies pride of place in Islam, and the science that studies it, religious jurisprudence (Fiqh), "has been the queen of Sciences during all Muslim history"<sup>106</sup>. As a result the Muslim mind has developed a juridical twist which goes back to the very Koran, where the relation between God and man is expressed in terms of a contractual nature<sup>107</sup>. The legalistic outlook of Islam was further strengthened down the centuries by the overwhelming importance attached to the Five Pillars of Islam and the Five Legal Categories of human behaviour<sup>108</sup>. And

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104 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 208.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid., p. 209.

107 Cf. Ibid., p. 210.

108 Cf. Ibid. The Five Pillars are the creed (shahāda), the ritual prayer (ṣalāt), the alms (zakāt), the Ramadan fast (ṣawm) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). The Five Legal Categories classify human actions in commanded, praiseworthy, indifferent, contemptible and prohibited (cf. "L'Islam, une religion", p. 11).

Dr Kraemer concludes:

There is therefore no cause for wonder that the religious mind in Islam has a juridic (sic) cast (4) and is impregnated consciously or unconsciously, with juridic categories as to the relation of Allah to man, or man to man (5).<sup>109</sup>

In a striking parallel Dr Kraemer compares Muslim nomocracy to Talmudic Judaism. Talmudic Judaism appeared in the history of the Jewish people when prophecy was replaced by the Torah promulgated by Ezra for the post-exilic community. The Torah, or the Law, became "an entity in itself"<sup>110</sup>. The theocracy of the Old Testament evolved into a nomocracy and eventually led to the emergence of Talmudic Judaism, in which a frozen concept of the Law displaced the idea of a "continuing Heilsgeschichte with its felicitous and terrible surprises"<sup>111</sup>. This was precisely the kind of Judaism that Muhammad became familiar with in his environment and that influenced him when he was mapping out a new life-pattern for his Arab followers.

The nomocratic understanding of the Muslim community encloses all the aspects of life within its legalistic compass.

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<sup>109</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 210. Note 4 in this quotation reads "In Part One, we hinted already at this point." Note 5 reads: "L. Gardet: Cité Musulmane analyses this excellently. In our following remarks we owe much to his analysis". (L. Gardet, La cité musulmane; vie sociale et politique, Etudes musulmanes, 1, Paris, J. Vrin, 1954, 404 p.)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

Quoting Massignon's definition of Islam as "une théocratie laïque"<sup>112</sup>, Dr Kraemer objects that the word 'laïque' refers to categories that are only relevant to the Western-Christian context. Within the framework of the Muslim system he prefers to speak of 'non-distinction' or to use terms like 'categoryless'. He explains:

Here appears again once more the necessity to try to grasp the meaning of the fact that Islam, explained from within and not from comparison with something else, presents us with the non-distinction of Church and State, of "religious" and "political" (or social or cultural), of "sacred" and "profane" or "secular" and "spiritual" (34). This non-distinction belongs to the essence of Islam as a nomocratic Religion.<sup>113</sup>

In Islam then only one category holds.

It is indeed important to try and grasp the meaning of Islam from within, but comparisons with other historical phenomena do help, as did Dr Kraemer's own parallel with Talmudic Judaism. In fact, our author in a number of his writings makes use of another example drawn from history in order better to illustrate the politico-religious nature of Islam. Islam's religious system, or the Corpus Islamicum as Dr Kraemer calls it, reminds one of the mediaeval Corpus

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112 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 217.

113 Ibid., p. 219. Note 34 in this passage reads: "In practice of course by sheer necessity, not on principles derived from Islam, distinctions were made and "emancipations" from the absolute claims of nomocracy, occurred in the history of Islam." Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

Christianum. This expression, he explains, should be taken in the sense that "Islam is a theological system and at the same time a complete civilization"<sup>114</sup>.

Dr Kraemer rather took a fancy to this idea of a Corpus Islamicum. He is the first, however, to warn us that the comparison with mediaeval Christianity should not be taken too far. It is true that there also was in the Christian world of the Middle Ages a tendency to consider everything sacral, to confuse for instance spiritual and secular power. But Christianity "has always been conscious of the relative autonomy of the categories that are absent in Islam"<sup>115</sup>. One can even say "in the light of Christianity's fundamental orientation"<sup>116</sup> that the Corpus Christianum of the Middle Ages was an aberrant phenomenon, a deviation from the true spirit of the Gospel. But the same cannot be said of the Corpus Islamicum in which, Dr Kraemer insists,

the programme of a realized theocracy, in religious and mundane respect, is entirely legitimate and valid in the light of the fundamental theocratic "Mitte" and "option" inherent in Islam.<sup>117</sup>

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114 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 270.

115 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 220.

116 Ibid., p. 221.

117 Ibid.

These observations help us to understand the main difference that separates the Muslim Umma and the Christian Church. There are other distinctions that can be made, all having their roots in Islam's avowed intention to be both a religious and a secular theocracy. We will only mention two. First of all, on the question of universality Dr Kraemer observes that: "The Umma, the Muslim community, is in principle and intention, one and indivisible"<sup>118</sup>. The Umma can be conceived as some sort of "universal nation"<sup>119</sup> or, better still, as "the only divinely-willed nation"<sup>120</sup>. The only discrimination between peoples that is in keeping with the spirit of Islam is the classic opposition between the "House of Islam" and the "House of War", the latter group being made up of all those that have not yet acknowledged Allah and His Prophet and are regarded as prospective faithful to be won over - even forcibly - to the House of Islam<sup>121</sup>. From this ideological view of the world Dr Kraemer gathers that "the idea of 'nation' and 'nationalism' militates against the universal conception of the Umma and the people of Allah and His Apostle (...)"<sup>122</sup>, although the Muslim peoples, similar

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118 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 212.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., p. 213.

122 Ibid.

in this to the rest of the colonial world, did not escape the tide of nationalism that marked the twentieth century.

A second point of interest concerns the ideal of brotherhood promoted by both communities. Both Islam and Christianity tend by their very character to create between their members a feeling of brotherhood based on common belonging. Dr Kraemer did in fact consider this point in one of his earlier writings, De Islam als probleem. He remarks that owing to its political nature Islam is obliged "to maintain its unity"<sup>123</sup>. This unity and the brotherhood that it fosters are indeed important features of Islam. But Muslim brotherhood will never be synonymous with Christian brotherhood because the two do not grow from the same root. Dr Kraemer insists on this important difference. In the Muslim community, he writes,

the particular cement of unity and brotherhood is however, when looked at more closely, not the one truth and the one love for the same Lord which bind together, but the fact of belonging to the same chosen Umma.<sup>124</sup>

These few excerpts from some of Dr Kraemer's writings outline in the main what differences he detects between Islam

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<sup>123</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 18: "(...) de ongehoord-sterke zucht om de 'eenheid der gemeente' te handhaven."

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 19: "Het eigenlijke cement der eenheid en broederschap is echter, op den keper beschouwd, niet de ééne waarheid en de ééne liefde tot denzelfden Heer, die samenbinden, maar het feit van het behooren tot dezelfde uitverkoren 'o e m m a'."

and Christianity understood as communities. It may be added at this point that the religious-political character of Islam has in nearly all cases proved the undoing of missionary efforts. This was clearly brought home to the missionaries by Dr Kraemer in his essay on "L'Islam, une religion". He reminded them that

the mistake that the Christian missions have always made in regard to Islam is to consider it exclusively a religion; that is why many missionary endeavours have remained half-fruitful. The missions approached Islam as the fortress of a religion whilst they were attacking at the same time a social, cultural and political stronghold.<sup>125</sup>

## 2. General Observations on Islam as a Religion.

Some of the points discussed in the previous paragraphs have already paved the way for some striking observations of Dr Kraemer's on Islam as a religion. Placing it against the standard proposed by Christian revelation, our author declares that Islam is a simple and superficial religion. In his 1938 brochure on De Islam als probleem he states as a mere matter of fact that

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<sup>125</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 3: "La faute que les Missions chrétiennes ont toujours commise à son égard est de l'avoir regardé exclusivement comme une religion, aussi beaucoup d'efforts missionnaires restent-ils à demi infructueux; elles ont abordé l'Islam comme la citadelle d'une religion, alors qu'elles attaquaient en même temps une citadelle sociale, culturelle, politique."

Islam is well-known as a simple religion with little complexity. And rightly so. The profile of Islam as a system of law and doctrine is clear and simple. A few straightforward and major thoughts command the whole (...).<sup>126</sup>

A similar view is expressed in The Christian Message written at about the same time:

In its main, genuine structure Islam is a simple religion. Its students are never weary of extolling its simplicity, pointing to the concise lapidary shahada (creed): There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Apostle.<sup>127</sup>

There is more to this than just a matter of simplicity. For Islam is not only an uncomplicated religion, it is a superficial one too. Dr Kraemer insists on thus qualifying the Muslim faith in the following passage:

Islam in its constituent elements and apprehensions must be called a superficial religion. The grand simplicity of its conception of God cannot efface this fact and retrieve its patent superficiality in regard to the most essential problems of religious life.<sup>128</sup>

No doubt Dr Kraemer has serious reasons for thus censuring the religion which gave to the world the eminent theologian Ghazzālī and the well-known mystic Fārābī. Here again the

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<sup>126</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 3: "De Islam staat bekend als een eenvoudige, weinig-gecompliceerde godsdienst. Terecht. De contouren van den Islam als stelsel van wet en leer zijn helder en eenvoudig. Eenige simpele en groote gedachten beheerschen het geheel (...)"

<sup>127</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 216. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 216-217.

criterion is biblical. Islam's shallowness stands out starkly when its teaching is weighed against the revelation in Jesus Christ. This is how our author puts it:

This superficiality appears from the deeply unsatisfactory way in which Islam deals with the crucial problems of religious and moral life, and this becomes the more evident because it arose in the shadow of Biblical realism.<sup>129</sup>

The same kind of appreciation appears again in his later writings. In "L'Islam, une religion" he writes that "owing to its strong hold on people's minds, Islam is a puzzling, shallow religion: it really neither raises nor solves any problems"<sup>130</sup> or again in "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten": "Islam in its simplicity is at the same time a shallow religion", and he adds what is no doubt the chief warrant for his judgment: "There is in Islam no real problématique of God, man and the world"<sup>131</sup>.

Apart from the reasons we have already touched upon when we compared common themes in Islam and Christianity, that in particular of God's and man's mutual relationship,

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129 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217.

130 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 34: "Par sa forte emprise sur les esprits, l'Islam est une religion énigmatique, superficielle: elle ne pose ni ne résoud vraiment de problèmes."

131 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 20: "In dieser Einfachheit ist er zugleich eine untiefe Religion. Es gibt im Islam keine Wirkliche Problematik von Gott, Mensch und Welt."

Dr Kraemer gives us a general explanation for the shallowness that he sees in Islam as a religion. He refers to Islam in The Christian Message as "a religion that has almost no questions and no answers"<sup>132</sup>. And he adduces two examples in proof of this. Let us take the question of salvation. Whether in the Koran or in the official theologies of Islam, Dr Kraemer argues,

the whole drama of salvation between God and the world, so vivid in Biblical realism, from which Islam, historically speaking, is an offshoot, is entirely absent. Obedience in surrender to the God of Omnipotence is the core of Islam.<sup>133</sup>

The same remark applies to Islam's way of dealing with the relation between faith and works. Dr Kraemer contends that this crucial problem arising in all great religions has been watered down in Islam to a mere consideration

of the relation between inward and outward conformity to Islam as a religious, social and political community, and lost its touch with the deeper religious question of which it is a part, namely, what is, respectively, the significance of faith and works in the problem of salvation?<sup>134</sup>

When Dr Kraemer speaks in this way, his remarks go beyond what is to be found in the Koran and apply to Muslim theology as a whole. He does not deny that Muslim dogmatics

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<sup>132</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

offer interesting developments. He recognizes for instance that the theology of Islam has "worked out the questions of God, man and the world"<sup>135</sup>. But this does not mean much, since in Islam "what comes first is the law" and not dogmatics<sup>136</sup>. Moreover, Dr Kraemer says, one never escapes the feeling

that in the encounter of God with man there arise no real, pressing questions. One always tries to bring human experience and koranic data into a certain harmony.<sup>137</sup>

We will not enlarge upon these general observations of Dr Kraemer's on the simplicity and shallowness of Islam. His conviction in this matter remained unperturbed from De Islam als Probleem in 1938 in which he, a Professor in the History of Religions at the University of Leiden, called Islam "een ondiepe godsdienst"<sup>138</sup> to the essay on "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" more than twenty years

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<sup>135</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 20: "Die Problematik von Gott, Mensch und Welt ist zwar in der Dogmatik ausgearbeitet (...)".

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., "(...) aber man muss immer bedenken, dass im Islam die Dogmatik an zweiter Stelle steht, das Gesetz aber an erster."

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., "(...) das Gefühl, dass in der Begegnung Gottes mit den Menschen hier keine wirkliche, bedrängende Problematik steckt. Man trachtet immer, menschliche Erfahrung und koranische Gegebenheiten in einen gewissen Einklang zu bringen."

<sup>138</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 4.

later when he still thought it was "eine untiefe Religion"<sup>139</sup>.

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To conclude. Islam and Christianity, the fraternal enemies as Dr Kraemer liked to call them, share a good deal in common. This is easily explained if one considers how Christian and Jewish ideas which Muhammad came across in his own environment at Mecca and Medina impinged upon the unfolding of his prophetic consciousness. Both Islam and Christianity regard their teachings on God, on revelation, on man, on prophecy and on the religious community as basic to their religious self-understanding. Although these teachings all find their origin in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in Islam the same themes bear the stamp of Muhammad's spiritual creativity and upon closer scrutiny reveal discrepancies with Christianity that are more important than the likenesses. That is the gist of Dr Kraemer's contention that the God of Muhammad is not the God of Jesus Christ.

Our author's analysis, then, shows how elusive and deceptive a quest for points of contact between Islam and Christianity is bound to be. It would be quite in accordance with the Kraemerian line of thought to call such points

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<sup>139</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 20.

'dialectical contacts' since they are based on questions that both link and divide at the same time. Our author prefers to call them "points névralgiques"<sup>140</sup>, in order no doubt to imply that meddling with them will often result in confusion and distress rather than conversion or success.

Our investigations of the differences that Dr Kraemer draws up between the two religions was one way of securing his views on Islam as a non-Christian system since these cannot be dispensed with should one wish to look into his missionary approach to the Muslim world. Besides, this study provides us with other information of equal relevance: not only does it let us into the spiritual atmosphere of the House of Islam, but it also throws unexpected light on some of the more urgent problems it has to contend with in modern times.

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<sup>140</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 32.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

A study of Islam can never be a purely theological endeavour since Islam is not merely a religion but a social system as well which knows of no distinction between the secular and the sacred. Dr Kraemer's understanding of that social system was based on a close scrutiny of its history, past and present, and particularly of the great changes brought to it through its clash with a powerful and conquering Europe in the nineteenth century. He observed the humiliations imposed on the Muslim world by the colonial domination of the Western countries, he followed the rise of many brands of nationalism amidst the several peoples composing that world, he witnessed the emergence of new nations as independent Islamic kingdoms and republics in the middle of the twentieth century and he foresaw the increasing power wielded by some of those nations owing to the discovery of petrol in their soils. In his writings about the Muslim world Dr Kraemer never considered Islam in the abstract, but always viewed it in the historical context of the moment.

As may be expected from a missionary, Dr Kraemer's interest for Islam went far beyond the detached curiosity the anthropologist or the phenomenologist feels for some exotic religion. Actually, in Dr Kraemer's case, the word interest

does not convey the depth and intensity of sympathy with which he followed what was taking place in the House of Islam, keeping abreast of current Muslim literature, trying to unravel the new trends and ideas, observing the political and social mutations and upheavals, analysing the causes and surmising the results and consequences.

This obsession of his for keeping close to what was happening in Islam there and then runs through all his writings. We will only mention his regular reviews of the Muslim press from 1923 to 1927 whilst he was in Java or his remarkable article for The Moslem World on "Islam in India Today" published in 1931<sup>1</sup>.

This essay on the problems of contemporary Islam is in keeping with Dr Kraemer's own way of approaching the question of the mission to Islam. The mission is not aimed at an abstract religion or theological system. Nor is it merely concerned with the historical developments that have made a religion what it is now. Both theology and history are equally important, and Dr Kraemer never hesitated to warn that little good could come out of a missionary's efforts should they not be grounded on a solid historical and theological knowledge of the non-Christian religion with which that missionary was struggling for Christ. But this alone

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Islam in India Today", in The Moslem World, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1931, p. 151-176.

would not carry him far enough. The missionary should add to this theoretical knowledge an understanding of what was happening to that religion now. That is precisely what we intend to achieve in these pages: finding out with Dr Kraemer what is coming to pass within the Muslim world now or, in other words, describing what kind of Islam the missionary has to deal with in the world's present state of affairs.

In his book The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World<sup>2</sup> Dr Kraemer included a chapter devoted to a careful survey of "The Present Religious Situation in the non-Christian World." The pages dealing with Islam, that "intensely political religion"<sup>3</sup>, are actually a review of the political events that took place in such countries as Turkey, Egypt and Iran, and an assessment of their impact on the Muslim community. Twenty years later Dr Kraemer wrote World Cultures and World Religions<sup>4</sup> and again his consideration of the religious problems of Islam took into account contemporary political and social events<sup>5</sup>. It may be objected that this situation

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2 Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p. Future references will quote only The Christian Message.

3 Ibid., p. 270.

4 Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions. The Coming Dialogue, London, Lutterworth Press, 1960, 386 p. Henceforth referred to as World Cultures.

5 Cf. ibid., especially p. 102-106; 281-293.

is not peculiar to Islam since all the great religions have borne the brunt of Western domination and European colonization and that they all have reacted to those circumstances in some definite way. But Islam stands in a class apart. Owing to its social and political nature as a theocratic system, it is bound to show extreme sensitiveness to social and political changes, all the more so if one bears in mind that the self-understanding of Islam includes, as Dr Kraemer points out, "the conviction that being according to the will of Allah 'the best of all Communities', it is destined to be the supreme ruling world empire"<sup>6</sup>.

#### 1. The Dynamic Urge of Secularism.

As Dr Kraemer was writing The Christian Message in 1937, most of the Arab or Muslim world stood in bondage, the colonial preserves of European imperialistic powers. The problems that arose from that situation were felt at all levels of life; they were religious, social and political. More than twenty years later those problems had not been assuaged by the accession to independence of the Muslim countries, although these were now possessed of powerful economic leverage and a decisive say in the economies of the very nations that had once been lording it over them. The renewed contact of the

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<sup>6</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 107.

Muslim world with the West, this time on an equal footing and as full-fledged interlocutor, coupled with its urgent need for technological knowledge and equipment, left the House of Islam even more liable to the shock-wave of the secularist tide that had already engulfed Europe. In an article written in 1960 for The Muslim World on "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", Dr Kraemer, after summing up the conditions prevailing in the Arab nations, concludes:

Such is, in brief, the present situation of Islamic culture in a time when the Muslim world has regained its right and power of self-disposal and yet makes the discovery that it cannot dispose of the uncontrollable spiritual and cultural forces which are unleashed by the interpenetration of all the parts of the world and by the impetus inherent in that impalpable, elusive reality: the dynamic secularist urge.<sup>7</sup>

The mention of "the dynamic secularist urge" reminds one that secularism is one of those religious phenomena, together with syncretism and mysticism, that have retained Dr Kraemer's unwavering interest. Already in 1930 he had contributed an article on "Christianity and Secularism" for The International Review of Missions<sup>8</sup>. Eight years later in the opening chapter of The Christian Message he was trying to evaluate the impact of secularism on the Christian

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<sup>7</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", in The Muslim World, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 1960, p. 247.

<sup>8</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 19, No. 2, April 1930, p. 195-208.

Church<sup>9</sup>. There lay for him the essence of the Western crisis. He was well aware that the same ferment was at work in the Muslim world. In The Christian Message he writes about "a radical nationalism and secularism which everywhere, especially in Turkey, have demonstrated enormous powers of reconstruction and destruction alike"<sup>10</sup>.

In its clash with secularist ideas and trends Islam is not any worse off than say the Christian religion which is also facing identical forces with the same upsetting consequences. The tragedy of Islam, in Dr Kraemer's view, is that its orthodox self-understanding does not prepare it to meet that challenge with any hope of success. Although the difficulties that Islam goes through now as a religion are not peculiar to the Muslim nations, they are compounded by the fact that a secularist view of the world is unthinkable within the theocratic outlook of Islam.

To express it differently and perhaps more to the point, Dr Kraemer would say that the religious problems besetting the Islamic theocracy in the modern state of affairs were not only brought in from the outside, but in so far as they called in question an official teaching of the Muslim faith they could be seen as pertaining to the very fabric of

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9 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 6-17.

10 Ibid., p. 273-274.

Islam. In this way the present historical juncture, fraught with difficulties and pregnant with unanswered questions, reveals the most basic problems of Islam as a religion. This view is borne out by Dr Kraemer's comments on Islam's religious law and its idea of revelation.

## 2. The Unrealizable Ideal of the Shari'a.

In 1935 Dr Kraemer wrote a comprehensive and scholarly essay on modern apologetics in Islam entitled "Eenige grepen uit de moderne apologie van den Islam"<sup>11</sup>. Speaking of the unavoidable interrogations that Islam must face in the contemporary world, he mentions two crucial questions. The first one is theological: how can Islam hold on to the affirmation of its truth against the onslaught of modern critical and historical relativism? The second concerns the Shari'a:

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<sup>11</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Eenige grepen uit de moderne Apologie van den Islam", in Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde, Vol. 75, No. 1, 1935, p. 1-35; No. 2, 1935, p. 165-217.

The other crucial question touches the very heart of Islam and arose through the meeting of the differentiated and secularised European society with the rigid mediaeval society of Islam. It is in my view the most difficult that can be put to Islam. It runs: Can Islam exist without the Shari'a and yet retain its identity?<sup>12</sup>

Two years later Dr Kraemer brings up the subject of the Shari'a once again in De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem<sup>13</sup>. This time he goes to the heart of the matter. He writes:

The Shari'a, the most characteristic creation of Islam, is nevertheless, speaking from a religious point of view, its problem, for divine revelation and positive law become totally identified in that Shari'a.<sup>14</sup>

This statement is enlightening and contains points that call for further comment if one is to grasp its full import. Let us first of all recall that Shari'a stands for religious law.

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<sup>12</sup> Kraemer, "Eenige grepen uit de moderne apologie van den Islam", p. 25-26: "De andere kernvraag raakt het hart van den Islam en is opgekomen door de ontmoeting van de gedifferentieerde geseculariseerde Europeesche maatschappij met de middel-eeuwsch-gebundene van den Islam. Zij is m.i. de moeilijkste vraag, die aan den Islam gesteld kan worden. Zij luidt: Kan de Islam zonder šari'a bestaan en daarbij zijn identiteit behouden?"

<sup>13</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1938, 48 p. In future references we shall quote only De Islam als probleem.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 13: "De Sjarī'a, de meest-karakteristieke schepping van den Islam is tevens, godsdienstig-gesproken, zijn probleem, daar goddelijke openbaring en positieve Wet in die Sjarī'a totaal vereenzelvigd worden."

Owing to the theocratic nature of Islam, this religious law becomes the pivot of Muslim life<sup>15</sup> and its positive regulations, based on the Koran and the tradition contained in the Sunna, assume the character of revelation. Given the understanding of revelation peculiar to Islam as something that is fixed for ever, the religious law can no more allow of change than revelation. This poses a formidable problem for contemporary Islam as Dr Kraemer explains:

The problem of modernizing Islam means therefore to come to terms with this shari'a, for the shari'a is virtually the regulation and sanctioning of a mediæval society on the basis of the revelation.<sup>16</sup>

And in this way, to borrow from our author again, "the most treasured possession of Islam has in reality become its heel of Achilles"<sup>17</sup>.

The express conviction that the Shari'a spells a most acute problem for Islam recurs like a refrain in our author's writings. One finds it advanced again in World Cultures where Dr Kraemer stresses the unescapable dilemma offered to the Muslim conscience and describes it for us:

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15 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 222.

16 Ibid.

17 Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 14: "(...) dat de Sjari'a het kostbaarste bezit van den Islam is, terwijl zij in werkelijkheid, godsdienstig gesproken, zijn Achilleshiel is."

Justifying in theory the central position of the Divine Law and yet in practice abolishing, ignoring and seeing it abolished and ignored by the imperious impact of the new social dynamic coming through the Western Invasion, this forces the sincere, thinking Muslim into an almost unbearable dilemma.<sup>18</sup>

In his last writing on Islam in a Christian Perspective<sup>19</sup> the author even speaks of a tragedy and contends that in actual fact the system has never worked:

The tragedy of the matter is that, while it belongs indeed to the fundamental animus of Islam to embody a realized theocracy as detailed in the Shari'a, the Shari'a has, except for certain sectors of life, mainly functioned as an unrealizable, inapplicable ideal.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. A Mechanical Idea of Revelation.

Does then the Shari'a constitute the fundamental problem of contemporary Islam? On the strength of certain statements from Dr Kraemer's pen, so it would appear. And yet, the matter is not all that clear and Dr Kraemer's comments present us with a confusing picture. In his short publication on De Islam als probleem he defines what he calls

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<sup>18</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 108.

<sup>19</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, an unfinished typescript of 271 pages, plus 40 sheets of notes and references. The work was to have included four parts, two of which only had been completed in 1965: Part I: "Historical Sketch of Islam. Origin and Development" and Part II: "Phenomenological Part."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

"the Fall" of Islam in terms of its standing for "a radically secularized form of the theocratic concept"<sup>21</sup>. He voices the same opinion in The Christian Message when he writes that the ideal of a secularized theocracy expresses "the deepest, the most crucial problem of Islam"<sup>22</sup>. At other times, however, the problem is pictured as one arising from a wrong understanding of revelation. That this too appears to Dr Kraemer to be one fundamental problem of Islam can be inferred from these words: "The foundation of Islam is not, the Word became flesh. It is, the Word became book"<sup>23</sup>. Owing to its "externalization and fossilization of revelation"<sup>24</sup>, Islam "is condemned to feed on a mechanical idea of revelation"<sup>25</sup>. In yet other passages the two subjects of revelation and theocracy are brought up together. For example, when he comments on Islam's reaction to Western civilization, he remarks that "the deeper issues of the essential nature of revelation and of its being a secularized theocracy are still evaded"<sup>26</sup>.

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21 Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 12: "Dat hij een in wezen radicaal-verwereldlijkte form der theocratische idea vertegenwoordigt, is de zondeval, die aan den aanvang van zijn loopbaan staat."

22 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 222.

23 Ibid., p. 217-218.

24 Ibid., p. 218.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 226.

What then is the fundamental problem of Islam: a mechanical idea of revelation or a radically secularized theocracy? Before trying to find an answer one may observe that one thing stands out in the way Dr Kraemer looks at the central problems of Islam: they are first and foremost religious or theological issues. There have appeared within Islam affronting modernity a number of social, economic and political quandaries. But the root problem remains theological. Dr Kraemer expresses this idea in various phrases all pointing in the same direction; a static view of revelation, a secularized theocracy, a religious law controlling all aspects of life, the legalistic mind of Islam, a faith degraded into an ideology<sup>27</sup>, the lack of distinction between sacred and profane: all these are theological questions. Are they perhaps theological variations on the same basic religious problem?

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27 Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 46: "Islam is by its nature the ideology of a cultural, social, and political system, and met as its opponent a Christendom, which also behaved, against the nature of the Christian faith, as the ideology of a cultural, social, and religious system". Dr Kraemer's italics. Dr Kraemer refers to Islam as an ideology again in an essay on "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch" for W. Holsten's edition of Neue Begegnung von Kirche und Islam, Stuttgart, Evang. Missionsverlag, 1960, p. 18. Future references to this article will quote only "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten".

Not quite. While an attentive examination of the various components of this religious problématique confirms the view that a narrow connection links them all, it is not easy to arrive at a common denominator. Three major elements have to be retained, namely the inescapable sway of the Sharī'a over the whole life of Islam; the radically secularized ideal of a theocratic Islam and the understanding of revelation peculiar to Islam. Their relationship can be best described in terms of the Sharī'a resting squarely on the Muslim ideas of theocracy and revelation: a theocracy which knows of no distinction between the secular and the religious and a revelation which has become identified with the religious law.

We may now try to wend our way carefully through Dr Kraemer's generous and perplexing use of superlatives in this tangle of Islam's most severe problems. From his writings one may gather that, theologically speaking, the fundamental point at issue is not primarily the Sharī'a or theocracy, but revelation. Indeed, if the Sharī'a raises a problem it is because, as Dr Kraemer reminded us earlier, in it "divine revelation and positive law have become totally identified"<sup>28</sup>. In World Cultures Dr Kraemer pinpoints what is "ultimately" the crux in this matter. It is revelation, he argues, since

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28 Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 13.

the theological problem is ultimately how to switch over in a legitimate way from a thoroughly fundamentalist, legalistic apprehension of Revelation to a dynamic one.<sup>29</sup>

He maintains the same point of view in an article published for the Revue de l'évangélisation on "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie"<sup>30</sup>. The problem is again one of understanding revelation properly. As Dr Kraemer puts it, the Koran's revelations respond to concrete problems arising in the day-to-day life of the Umma founded by Muḥammad. As the Koran is regarded as the direct word of God, eternal and infallible, it follows that "a historical situation is in fact conceived as eternal and immutable because it has the status of a pre-existing divine word. This is the fundamental problem of

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29 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 109.

30 Hendrik Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme", in Revue de l'évangélisation, Vol. 16, No. 87, January-February 1960, p. 2-38. References to this article quote only "L'Islam, une religion".

Islam<sup>31</sup>.

History takes us back to the great shift in Muhammad's career, when the ideal of a secular theocracy was finally accepted as Islam's true vocation in the world. A purely religious revival became a political movement of conquest spurred by a religious ideology, and a religious community turned into a political society bent on world domination. This original orientation of Islam cannot now be changed: it is part of its revelation and that revelation is immutable.

The same revelation also embraces the religious law which controls all aspects of Muslim life. It is contrary to the nature of that religious law to admit of secularisation.

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31 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 8: "C'est ainsi qu'une situation historique est en fait conçue comme éternelle et inchangeable parce qu'ayant le statut d'une parole divine préexistante. C'est le problème fondamental de l'Islam." J.M.S. Baljon in his article "Openbaring in de moderne Islam", in Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift, Vol. 6 (1951/52), No. 6, August 1952, p. 321-328, disagrees with Dr Kraemer's view expressed in "Eenige grepen uit de moderne apologie van den Islam" that the main problem of Islam lies in the Shari'a. The real question, he says, should be formulated as follows, p. 328: "Through which religious conception can a belief, not to be held any longer, in the infallibility of the Koran be replaced?" (Door welke religieuze conceptie kan het niet langer meer te handhaven geloof in de onfeilbaarheid van de Koran vervangen worden?). It is in other words a matter of redefining revelation. From our discussion it is clear that Dr Kraemer would agree with Baljon. One may still think that if the key question is theological, grounded as it is in Islam's understanding of revelation, the immediate and urgent problem of Islam hinges on the Shari'a.

And yet, as Dr Kraemer remarks in Islam in a Christian Perspective, "at present the Islamic world is faced with the necessity of laicization of State and Society"<sup>32</sup>.

Theocracy and Shari'a raise tremendous problems for contemporary Islam. But only a renewed understanding of revelation could enable Islam to revise its ideal of worldly domination and loosen the grip of the Shari'a on its life. That Dr Kraemer should see in the Islamic notion of revelation the key to its problems and the kingpin on which its future as a religion hinges, is a striking illustration of his conviction that in religion the basic problems are always theological. This fits strangely well with the point of departure or the central theme - whichever way one may want to look at it - of all his theological thinking: his understanding of Christian revelation.

#### 4. The Unawareness of Islam.

The theocratic ideal of Islam and its particular concept of revelation together with the pervasiveness of the Shari'a are the three corners of a triangle within which the Muslim world finds it so difficult to meet modernity in an adequate manner. But for Dr Kraemer what is more serious and leads to an even more dangerous situation is that Islam does

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<sup>32</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 222.

not seem to be aware of this. Whether in its past history or in the contemporary period, Muslim thinkers do not realize the theological queries raised by the basic religious apprehensions of Islam.

Speaking of the identification of divine revelation and positive law in the Sharī'a, Dr Kraemer does not conceal his astonishment: "A most strange fact in the whole range of Muslim theology is, according to me, that never yet has a Muslim theologian felt this as the problem"<sup>33</sup>. The same remark is made in The Christian Message, this time in respect of the problem of theocracy: which shows again how closely in Dr Kraemer's mind the questions of revelation and theocracy stand together. He writes:

It seems to us that a problem, still deeper than this deep problem, is that never in the whole history of Islam has this inherent and initial secularization of its conception of theocracy become a vexing religious problem for Moslem thinkers.<sup>34</sup>

Those comments go back to the year 1937. One may well wonder whether there has been a change in Muslim thought over the years. Dr Kraemer thinks not. He reports that Muslim writers do not seem to be awakened yet to the significance of the

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33 Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 13-14: "Een zeer bevreemdend feit in de heele Moslimsche theologie is m.i. dat nog nooit een Moslimsch theoloog dit gevoeld heeft als het probleem." Accented by Dr Kraemer.

34 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 223.

theological problem nor have intellectuals come to grips with the religious question yet. An interesting footnote in World Cultures bears out, although in an indirect way, the impression that the problems of Islam have not so far been studied in their theological aspect. Dr Kraemer writes:

Note that the outstanding Muslim writers on the problem Islam/modern world, in India as well as in the Arabic-speaking world, are nearly all laymen and not theologians.<sup>35</sup>

#### 5. The Inadequate Responses of Islam.

A fair idea of how theologians, scientists and intellectuals in general look at the present problems of Islam can be gathered from the 1958 Colloquium of Lahore on which Dr Kraemer comments at some length in World Cultures<sup>36</sup>. The Colloquium, attended by more than 160 delegates, included Western orientalist and outstanding Muslims from many countries. The topics treated and debated dealt with the "new situations and problems by which Islam, like all religions today, is confronted"<sup>37</sup>. The heated reactions set in motion by the advanced opinions of some of the participants are a clear indication, Dr Kraemer writes,

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<sup>35</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 121, note 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 293-298.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

that the prevailing attitude in the Muslim world is still to follow the line of how to adjust positions and principles, considered as themselves undebatable and unassailable, to and in a totally changed world.<sup>38</sup>

Broaching such questions as "the validity of Islam its claims and authority"<sup>39</sup> is not yet tolerated. Dr Kraemer notes that the Pakistani members were conspicuous for the critical points they raised, but that their ideas were met with protests from the majority.

Generally speaking, our author sees in the Colloquium a model of the way Islam tries to adjust itself to the changed circumstances of the world whilst aiming at a new self-understanding. A reinterpretation of the fundamental principles of Islam is attempted with a view to proving "the validity, even superiority of Islam"<sup>40</sup>. Dr Kraemer takes a dim view of that kind of experimentation because, as he writes,

This re-interpretation often gives quite a new content and twist to many Islamic key-ideas, which do not find full justification in the original meaning of Koran, Sunna or the classical system, and are strong evidence of the great influence of Western humanistic and "Christian" notions.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 294. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

In Islam in a Christian Perspective Dr Kraemer deals more fully with the various reactions of Islam to the stimulus of Western ideas and the searching interrogations these ideas face it with. Islam's response comes into three forms, one of which can be detected in current Muslim literature. Dr Kraemer calls it ideological and programmatic and describes it as

a theological or cultural reassessment of Islam and the old life-pattern in the face of the necessity to integrate somehow the onslaught of modern civilization into the categories and structures Islam has developed in its history.<sup>42</sup>

The judgment of Dr Kraemer on this mode of response is guarded. It is full of variety, he says, and full of discordant voices; it even includes "inculpations and repudiations of Islam and the past"<sup>43</sup>. But who will tell how much religious sincerity goes into it? At all events, Dr Kraemer writes, "Islam is upheld as the true faith and the divinely appointed instrument of ordering society"<sup>44</sup>. This literature sets great importance by the brilliant past of Islam which holds out a comforting vision in the midst of the present social and political turmoil. Generally speaking, what comes out of those publications is "essentially a search for a new mode

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<sup>42</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

of self-identity"<sup>45</sup>.

Once again, from the way its thinkers and writers meet the pointed questions that Western progress throws at it, one may speak of the unawareness of Islam. The truly religious question does not seem to exist at all. In much the same terms that he had used for the Lahore Colloquium, Dr Kraemer writes about Islam's current cultural reassessment that it is

a search not (or not yet) of faith in the purely religious sense of the word, but a struggle for preserving and reasserting, in the midst of turbulent changes and of the shaking of the foundations, one's Islamic socio-cultural identity.<sup>46</sup>

The two other modes of response of Islam to the problems it faces in the modern situation concern the political field of action on the international and national planes and the social and economic order. The challenges to be met in these particular fields very often call for immediate action and have a disquieting effect on the Muslim nations. As regards the process of socio-economic change induced by the influence of Western ideas Dr Kraemer comments that "it modifies the old life- and behaviour-patterns in a far more thoroughgoing way than any new theology, any

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<sup>45</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 151.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

brilliant synthesis of Old and New can do"<sup>47</sup>. Inevitably, under the present circumstances, the touchy question of the relation between secular and profane, or rather the lack of distinction between the two, will have to be considered anew<sup>48</sup>. In fact, as Dr Kraemer mentioned in World Cultures, certain governments have already taken steps towards state secularization. The case of Turkey is a radical example of this: under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk, it declared itself a secular state as early as 1924. Other countries do the same in a roundabout way, as Dr Kraemer points out, "by simply bypassing the unsolved fundamental questions"<sup>49</sup>. Not so Egypt, however, where "the profoundly un-Islamic idea of the separation of 'religion' and 'secular world' has become the rule"<sup>50</sup> since the promulgation of a National Law in 1956. In the National Law the sovereignty of the state is proclaimed "complete and absolute in the interior"<sup>51</sup> and no mention is made of Allah. Dr Kraemer takes this to mean that "the unequivocal, summary abolition of the hallowed Islamic theocratic

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47 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 153.

48 Cf. Ibid., p. 152.

49 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 109.

50 Ibid., p. 285.

51 Ibid., p. 284.

order of life"<sup>52</sup>, has been made official, but not, he adds, "that the Islamic consciousness of Egypt has digested this revolution, nor that the Shari'a as a problem is definitely eliminated"<sup>53</sup>.

To the Egyptian solution he opposes the example of Pakistan, which became an Islamic republic in 1956 and whose constitution professes that

the sovereignty over the whole universe belongs exclusively to Allah and that He has delegated His rights of sovereignty to the people of Pakistan for the ruling of their own country.<sup>54</sup>

Obviously Pakistan is trying to operate a synthesis between Muslim theocracy and Western democratic ideals. Our author thinks that there is indeed in that country a definite tendency to lean more "towards recent great Muslim reformists and not towards the mediaeval Shari'a"<sup>55</sup>.

#### 5. Islam and Democracy.

Dr Kraemer welcomes the opening of the Muslim world to the concept of democracy and sees in it a sign that the traditional idea of the theocratic state is slowly wearing

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<sup>52</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 285.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

off in the House of Islam. But it is clear that he cherishes no illusions either. When he was writing World Cultures about 1959<sup>56</sup> and drafting what was intended to be Islam in a Christian Perspective some time after 1960, he could not help having his doubts about Islam's consistency with the framework of democratic government. In World Cultures he affirms that "the Western conception of democracy is intrinsically alien" to Islam<sup>57</sup>. Commenting on the way Islam generally treats its religious minorities, he notes that in Egypt for instance Christians are "not equal but second-rate citizens"<sup>58</sup>. He does not see eye to eye with those observers who think that "Islamic doctrine and modern dynamism are beginning to find each other"<sup>59</sup>, because this opinion underrates "the strength and peculiar religious nature of Islam and the logic of its doctrine"<sup>60</sup>.

Islam in a Christian Perspective offers more of the same. On religious tolerance Dr Kraemer writes that Islam does not admit of it in the modern sense of the word, "which

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<sup>56</sup> The book, published in 1960, is based on the Stone Lectures Dr Kraemer delivered at Princeton Theological College in 1958.

<sup>57</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 291.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 292, note 1.

is quite in accordance with its totalitarian character"<sup>61</sup>.

This allusion to totalitarianism calls to mind a rather startling observation Dr Kraemer had made years earlier in

The Christian Message:

A very pertinent way to define Islam would be to call it a mediaeval and radically religious form of that national-socialism which we know at present in Europe in its pseudo-religious form. As with all militant creeds of group solidarity Islam evinces therefore a bitter and stubborn resistance to any effort that might involve change of religion, or, to put it more adequately, to any break in group solidarity.<sup>62</sup>

Whatever may be the shortcomings of the Islamic countries on the point of religious tolerance, Muslim thinkers and politicians claim that Islam is democratic by its nature and principles. Dr Kraemer demurs and writes:

Whether this reasoning is really tenable, when one considers the peculiar spirit and aims of modern Democracy and its close relation with the development of secularism, is a moot question.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 147, note 81. Cf. also p. 214.

<sup>62</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 353. Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 9: "How much the Christian Church flourished in Asia Minor and in Africa! How thoroughly Islam drove Christianity out or made it powerless! (paragraph) The process has the same ruthless quality that is shown by the totalitarian powers of our time." (Hoe grootsch heeft de Christelijke Kerk gebloeid in Klein-Azië en Afrika! Hoe radicaal heeft de Islam het Christendom daar uitgedreven of krachteloos gemaakt! (alinea) Het proces heeft hetzelfde meedoogenlooze aspect dat de totalitaire machten van onzen tijd laten zien.)

<sup>63</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 223.

In his article on "L'Islam, une religion", for reasons that are rooted in the theology of Islam, he is far more outspoken in his rejection of that opinion. He writes:

In theory and in practice Muslim theocracy is based on a revealed book, immutable in principle and excluding therefore that dynamism which is the stamp of modern democracy.<sup>64</sup>

#### 7. The Forces of Conservatism.

In its efforts to adapt to the changes forced upon it by modernity, Islam has to contend with the resistance of conservatism. In his writings Dr Kraemer draws the attention of his reader to this important and unpredictable factor. We have already mentioned how the debates at the Lahore Colloquium had been swayed by the influence of a conservative majority. In World Cultures Dr Kraemer agrees that the present state of Islam in the world offers an incoherent picture and he thinks there is one obvious reason for this. He writes:

In all our meditations on the "modern trends of Islam" we should never forget that the strongest but least palpable force in Islam is everywhere the most conservative wing, which refuses to come to terms with the modern world.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 7-8: "En théorie et en pratique, la théocratie musulmane se fonde sur un livre révélé, inchangeable par principe et qui, forcément, exclut le dynamisme qui caractérise la démocratie moderne."

<sup>65</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 297.

Actually, Dr Kraemer does not say much on the baneful influence wielded by the conservatives in the battle waged by new independent Muslim states to achieve some degree of modernization. The general picture that emerges from his survey of the situation is that of nations in which "various grades of conservative and 'liberal' trends continue their struggle"<sup>66</sup>, as he writes when speaking of Egypt.

#### §. The Koran and Modern Exegesis.

There is, however, one important sector of the Muslim doctrine which has not yet broken free from the lasting influence of the traditionalist elements in the House of Islam. Dr Kraemer thinks it both significant and regrettable that the Koran still lies beyond the reach of modern exegesis. Speaking of Islam's unwillingness to reconsider its understanding of revelation, he submits that the Koran is just one more illustration of this:

Very conspicuous is this understandable reluctance in the general refusal to enter on the path of applying historical criticism to the Koran as it has been and is done to the Bible, with all attending upheavals.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 283.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 109. Cf. Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 26: "Koranic criticism is simply out of the question" (An Korankritik is nicht zu denken).

One only has to remember how Daud Rahbar, a professor in the theological faculty at Ankara, was rebuked at the Lahore Colloquium because "he clearly showed his openness to historical criticism of Koran and hadīth"<sup>68</sup>.

In Islam in a Christian Perspective Dr Kraemer expatiates somewhat on the subject of Koran exegesis. This question, he says, has always been ruled by one unshakeable principle, namely that the Koran is "a solid block of incommensurable divine Revelation, the possession of which marks off the Umma from all other Religions"<sup>69</sup>. Consequently, modern exposition of the Koran belongs mostly to the apologetic type. Its outstanding trait, Dr Kraemer explains,

is not only to harmonize the Quran with modern Science and modern political and social ideals, but rather to demonstrate the Quran's superior position by the fact that the "Book" contained these modern ideas and intuitions in seminal form already long before the "modern world" was born.<sup>70</sup>

And he points out that this exegesis rarely extends to religious hermeneutics<sup>71</sup>. Far from being submitted to the searchlight of modern criticism, the Koran is seen mostly as a means of proving Islam's superiority. Its hidden riches as

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68 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 295.

69 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 268.

70 Ibid., p. 270.

71 Ibid.

a source of renewal for the religious life of the Muslim are thus generally ignored.

There are exceptions, however. In September 1961 Dr Kraemer read a communication at a meeting of the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences. This appeared in print in 1962 and is no doubt the last publication to come from the pen of our author on matters relating to Islam. Entitled Een nieuw geluid op het gebied der Koranexegese<sup>72</sup>, it contains a scholarly exposition on koranic exegesis and Muslim apologetics in general, and a comment on Daud Rahbar's book, God of Justice<sup>73</sup>. It is obvious that a number of ideas expressed in Dr Kraemer's address did find their way into his draft of Islam in a Christian Perspective.

Remarking on the renewed flow of Muslim apologetic publications since the middle of the nineteenth century, Dr Kraemer does not find in these much effort towards true exegesis, that is to say towards an understanding of the koranic text as such. For that reason, he goes on, "one is still far away from working out a true koranic theology in

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72 Hendrik Kraemer, Een nieuw geluid op het gebied der Koranexegese, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe reeks, Deel 25, No. 1, Amsterdam, N.V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1962, 28 p. We shall refer to this essay under the title of Een nieuw geluid.

73 Daud Rahbar, God of Justice. A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'an, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960, xxi-446 p.

order thus to reach through to the religious core of that Holy Book"<sup>74</sup>. One outstanding exception is the Pakistani writer Daud Rahbar, who states his intentions as follows:

The task of interpreting the Qur'ān is therefore one of excavation, viewing its unsophisticated thought in true historical perspective by reconstructing that primitive atmosphere in which it was revealed.<sup>75</sup>

What matters here is not what Kraemer has to say on Rahbar's idea of God as he appears in the Koran, but the link that our author postulates between a certain mode of koranic exegesis and the religious revival of Islam. As Dr Kraemer sees it, the value of Rahbar's effort is that he has shown the way towards "the possibility of a true religious and theological renewal inside Islam"<sup>76</sup>. Up till now Muslim apologetics and exegesis had fought shy of asking the Koran the religious and theological questions that really mattered. Rahbar's book is a first step towards a genuine religious problématique because it directs "unrestricted elementary

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<sup>74</sup> Kraemer, Een nieuw geluid, p. 12: "Ook is men om dezelfde reden nóg ver verwijderd van het uitwerken ener echt Quranische theologie om zo tot de godsdienstige kern van dit Heilige Boek door te dringen."

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 15. Quoted in English by Dr Kraemer. Cf. Rahbar, God of Justice, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 28: "Hij heeft daarmee de weg gewezen tot de mogelijkheid van een echte religieuze en theologische vernieuwing binnen de Islam."

religious questions to the basic book of Islam, the Koran"<sup>77</sup>.

9. Will Islam Become a Religion Pure and Simple?

With these notes on koranic exegesis we finally come upon the question which subsumes all others: What is the future of Islam as a religion? Since Dr Kraemer published The Christian Message or De Islam als probleem in 1938, the Muslim peoples have achieved their independence and, in the case of the Arab nations in particular, now wield an economic power that has made them into respected interlocutors in the encounter between East and West. But the birth of distinct nations with their varied political loyalties has eroded the unity of the Umma. Moreover, the political and economic needs of the hour have led the Muslim governments in part or totally to reject or ignore the century-old guidance of the Sharī'a. In this regard Dr Kraemer speaks freely of the corrosion of the Muslim socio-political system. He quotes as an example the 1956 promulgation of the National Law in Egypt and explains in World Cultures that "this legislative event proves the extent of the relentless corrosion by which the theological bases and the traditional life-patterns of

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<sup>77</sup> Kraemer, Een nieuwe geluid, p. 28: "(...) een eerste werkelijke intrede in de religieuze problematiek door het stellen van onbevongen elementaire religieuze vragen aan het grondboek van de Islam, de Koran."

Islam are ravaged"<sup>78</sup>. The question that immediately comes to mind in this setting of corrosive influences and insidious changes is this: What will become of Islam as a religion?

One has every right to think that this, too, was the question that most exercised Dr Kraemer's foresight as he took stock of events and changes in the Muslim world during the fifties and early sixties. The very same question recurs to haunt him in practically all his later writings on Islam. Indeed this problem of the future of Islam had already presented itself to his mind as he was assessing the impact of secularization in Turkey. In The Christian Message he tries to measure the consequences of such an event for Islam quā religion. After observing that Turkey's decisive break with her past "has annihilated in an incredibly short time the unwieldy theocratic Corpus Islamicum"<sup>79</sup>, he goes on to say: "It has also forced Islam to make an experiment it never could have dreamed of on its own account, namely to start its career as a religion pure and simple"<sup>80</sup>.

The phrase "Islam as a religion pure and simple" conveys in a nutshell Dr Kraemer's hopes and fears for the future of Islam. Mostly fears, however. For when Dr Kraemer sits

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78 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 285.

79 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 280.

80 Ibid. Dr Kraemer's italics.

down to weigh the odds, one detects in his thoughts a strain of pessimism. He notes how often personal conviction or faith has little to do with the feeling of belonging that Islam begets in its followers. As he reports on the spiritual climate prevailing in Syria, Palestine, Tunis, Morocco, India, etc., he concludes that

a great many of the intellectuals in those countries are as private persons indifferent to all religion, but in their public life are staunch and passionate defenders of Islam as the symbol of group-solidarity.<sup>81</sup>

In this case Islam becomes little more than "a precious asset for nationalist ends"<sup>82</sup>, with the not unexpected result that there occurs, as Dr Kraemer puts it, "on the one hand a stiffening and hardening of Islam and on the other hand a deviation from genuine religious questioning"<sup>83</sup>. Islam then has been turned into an instrument of protest rather "than an object of really religious and moral concern or reform"<sup>84</sup>.

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81 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 276. A few years earlier he had made the same remark in his article on "Islam in India Today", p. 166: "One may even be, religiously speaking, lukewarm or indifferent or negligent, but one can be at the same time fervently loyal to the community. Such a situation and attitude is very frequent among many Moslems prominent in public life."

82 Ibid., p. 274.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., p. 275.

Twenty years later Dr Kraemer's assessment of the religious situation of Islam is that there are no signs of change yet. In World Cultures he explains that the deeper questions have not yet been met. He writes:

The real thing has still to happen, i.e. "the launching into the deep." The time for ways of response which take their terms from the heart and not from the system of Islam itself seems not yet at hand. In this period of inevitable self-defence and self-assessment as dictated by the overwhelming suggestive power of the West, the depth-dimension remains, it seems, out of reach. For only a new creative urge, issuing from the depth of Islam itself and true to its authentic religious self, can give a new beginning.<sup>85</sup>

One of the sections of the book just quoted opens upon an interrogation mark: "A New 'Religious' Career for Islam?"<sup>86</sup> Once more our author refers to his favourite case, the Turkish experiment, and once more his observations force him to conclude that "it seems very unlikely that Islam will ever become more than a side-issue of no real relevance to the whole national existence"<sup>87</sup>. Only in the case of Pakistan would he venture to speak of a resurgence of Islam, but then in the qualified sense of a young nation trying "to realize this emphatic allegiance to Islam as a religion and a

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<sup>85</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 125. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

culture"<sup>88</sup> in the changed conditions of the modern world.

One might perhaps see in an upsurge of missionary activity a sign of renewed religious fervour. Dr Kraemer admits that Islam is at the present time "one of the most active and successful missionary religions in the world, particularly in Africa, but also in some other parts"<sup>89</sup>.

But on this point he makes two important observations. First, he notes that "Islam's missionary expansion and influence is already of long date"<sup>90</sup> and that the present drive of Muslim proselytism, most of all in Africa, can be accounted for by political reasons<sup>91</sup>. Secondly, Islam's only missionary organization operating in the West, the Ahmadiyya movement founded in India in the nineteenth century, belongs in reality to "groups that are excluded from or only half-heartedly included in the fold of 'orthodox' Islam"<sup>92</sup>.

The views of Dr Kraemer on an eventual resurgence of Islam did not change within the few years that separated the publication of World Cultures from the unfinished typescript of Islam in a Christian Perspective. In this last writing he

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88 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 288.

89 Ibid., p. 266.

90 Ibid., p. 288, note 1.

91 Cf. Ibid.

92 Ibid., p. 266.

reflects on the humble beginnings of Islam when it was "a personal Religion of members of a purely religious conventicle"<sup>93</sup>, and wishes it would go back to the spirit that first moved it. He writes:

At present, as a result of the secularization of the world everywhere, Islam is virtually invited by the course of present events to return to its original start of being the confession and witness of a purely religious body.<sup>94</sup>

Will Islam find in its midst the new prophet who would launch it upon its new career, another Ghazzālī for instance?

Dr Kraemer fervently hopes so:

Out of sympathy with the present Muslim world in travail, one would wish for the emergence of a modern Ghazali, inspired by the same thirst for truth and spiritual depth.<sup>95</sup>

As it is, the signs do not point in the direction of a purely religious revival of Islam. Dr Kraemer mentions again Turkey's "total break with the classical theocratic-nomocratic system"<sup>96</sup> without hiding his reservations as to its positive consequences for a spiritual renaissance of Islam in that

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<sup>93</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 153. Underlined by Dr Kraemer.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 154. During his missionary days in the Dutch East Indies, Dr Kraemer had already written in "Islam in India Today", p. 170: "Islam is still waiting for its modern Ghazali, who will penetrate to the personal problem of religious truth and salvation." Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

country. He thinks that this sudden break has left Turkey with "the unprecedented agonizing problem from what sources to recreate Islam as a vital religious-moral power"<sup>97</sup>. He deprecates a definite lack of vision in the Muslim world, a perilous shortsightedness that boils down to Islam's ignorance of its most important problem. And yet its religious future is at stake, as he explains in the following passage:

The future vitality of Islam as a Religion depends on the question whether the problem is really seen in its depth and magnitude for it seems that only such a vision would be able to stimulate towards a passionate re-exploration of the vital religious forces of Islam.<sup>98</sup>

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It would be ludicrous to allege that the problems confronting the nations of the Muslim world are merely religious; nor is it Dr Kraemer's intention to do so. Those problems are social, economic and political. On this score Muslim states do not differ from the rest of the world where social, economic and political needs continuously challenge

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97 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 222.

98 Ibid., p. 222-223. For a comparison of some of the views expressed by Dr Kraemer in the above pages with his observations on modern trends and spiritual life in Islam after four months' stay in Cairo in 1921-22, cf. C.F. Hallencreutz, Kraemer Towards Tambaram. A Study in Hendrik Kraemer's Missionary Approach, Studia Missionalia VII, Lund, Gleerup, 1966, p. 159-161, in which the author comments on the ideas contained in Dr Kraemer's report of his Cairo visit.

statesmen with urgent decisions to make in order to maintain or bring back social harmony, economic progress and political stability within their respective countries. What these pages have been mostly concerned with, however, was the chief problem of contemporary Islam, that is to say the conflicts that a secularized theocracy such as Islam is bound to experience in the welter of social, economic and political crises peculiar to the world of developing nations. Our survey, under the guidance of Dr Kraemer, has shown that the core of the problems confronting Islam was religious. Whether we consider this core to be Islam's ideal of a theocracy, the Muslim concept of revelation, or the Shari'a's all-embracing influence, we are thrown back to the theological dimension of Islam. Only in that perspective can one plumb the depths of Islam's bewilderment in a secularized world.

The conclusions reached in this study tend to confirm the differences that separate Islam and Christianity. Whatever may be the theological similarities and differences between the Muslim doctrine and the Christian faith, one essential feature of Islam cancels the resemblances and sharpens the divergences: the socio-political character of the community founded by Muhammad. It is significant too that the nomocratic-theocratic structure of Islam has not yet been submitted by Muslim thinkers to the probing and sounding of theological criticism, unlike what has for years

been happening in the West with respect to the Christian Churches.

We might now wind up with Dr Kraemer's wish that Islam shall at long last see which obstacle blocks its way to true religious revival: the conception of a religious community whose energies are diverted towards the achievement of secular goals. We would also add, as far as one could go by Dr Kraemer's judgment, that this eventuality was not yet in the offing.

But in so doing we should be missing the real thrust of Dr Kraemer's reflexions and ignoring the spirit that inspired them. Surprising as it may sound, Dr Kraemer is convinced that Islam could get rid of the trammels of secular theocracy; he is sure that it could go on as a religion pure and simple. He thinks that there lies in Islam, in the history of its origins, in the verses of its Holy Book, a treasure of spiritual energies upon which it could draw for its renaissance, for a new religious career, as he himself puts it. And yet this comes from a man who refuses to see in Allah the God of Jesus Christ, or in Muhammad a prophet after the manner of the Old Testament; and from a missionary to boot, who would claim the House of Islam for Jesus Christ. Did Dr Kraemer think perhaps that only by being faithful to its true self Islam could ever understand the truth of Jesus Christ? In any case, Dr Kraemer's own dialectical disposition

towards Islam is consistent in a man who professes to follow what is happening to the religion of the Prophet "not with the attitude of a detached spectator, but with that of a deeply involved participator and co-actor"<sup>99</sup>. In this he stands as a model to all missionaries concerned with God's design on Islam.

Those missionaries will no doubt be exercised over the most puzzling question that the present situation of Islam brings to their minds. Does this new conjuncture offer them fresh opportunities for taking the Gospel to the Muslim world? They will no doubt entertain the hope that Islam may have become more open to the Christian faith inasmuch as it is now falling under the spell of many Western ideas. This could only be possible if novel conditions prevailing in the Muslim/countries had somehow done away with Islam's century-old suspicion towards Christianity. How far the objectives of the mission to the Muslim world may be furthered by contemporary events can only be assessed after one has grasped the nature and extent of Islam's ingrained resistance to the message of the Gospel.

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<sup>99</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", p. 245.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RESISTANCE OF ISLAM TO EVANGELISM

As a student of religions Dr Kraemer was fascinated by the riddle of Islam, or, as he explains in De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, by the fact that "although as a religion it lacks depth and is poor of content, yet it outdoes all other religions in the world by the strength with which it lays hold on its followers"<sup>1</sup>. But the riddle of Islam has also another side to it, a missionary dimension so to speak. As a Christian missionary Dr Kraemer felt drawn to Islam with an interest that never waned and a sympathy that had in it a touch of the passionate. Yet history told him that Islam had always opposed singular resistance to the zeal of Christian evangelists. The experience of contemporary missions also showed him that Islam stood fast notwithstanding the all-out assaults of missionaries like Dr S.W. Zwemer or the patient and tactful methods used by the personnel of the American institutions in Beyrouth or Cairo. That a religion so closely bound to

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam; als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1936, p. 5, in future references to be quoted as De Islam als probleem: "Het raadselachtige in den Islam nu is, dat hij, ofschoon als godsdienst ondiep en arm van inhoud, alle godsdiensten ter wereld overtreft door de kracht waarmee hij beslag legt op zijn belijders."

Christianity by all sorts of ties should show itself so proof against the Gospel was what Dr Kraemer called the missionary problem of Islam. Not only did he see in it a missionary problem, but he thought that for many Christians and missionaries Islam had become a stumbling-block, a cause for scandal, especially when they considered, as he writes, "the destructive significance of Islam for the Christian Church through history and had experienced to their cost the forbidding inaccessibility of that religion"<sup>2</sup>.

It is necessary for our purpose that we should spend some time on setting forth the main difficulties of the Christian mission to Islam as Dr Kraemer saw them. Our author touched upon those difficulties whenever he dealt with Islam in the light of the missionary mandate of the Christian Church. But he did not compile in set form an exhaustive list of reasons for the difficulties the Christian missionaries have been experiencing in their dealings with Islam. In this essay we will expound them as they are to be found scattered here and there in a number of his writings.

That there are special difficulties facing the missionary going out to Islam, nobody will deny. In The

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<sup>2</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 8: "(...) die de destructieve beteekenis van den Islam voor de Christelijke Kerk in de geschiedenis heeft bepeinsd, en die de grimmige ontoegankelijkheid van dezen godsdienst aan den wijve heeft ervaren (...)." .

Christian Message in a Non-Christian World Dr Kraemer sums up the situation aptly when he writes: "Through all the ages Islam has been, in relation to the missionary efforts of the Christian Church, the teacher of patience"<sup>3</sup>. We need not for the time being insist any more on this observation borne out by the long experience of the Church. But it is important to look into the reasons why Islam shows itself so hostile to the efforts of missionaries to whatever Christian traditions they may belong. This search will provide, we hope, a better grasp of Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam. As one goes through his writings, one finds a number of explanations why Islam still resists all attempts to evangelize it. One of those explanations takes into account the historical encounters between the Muslim world and the West. Another finds its rationale in the social consciousness of Islam. Further, the religious or theological foundations of Islam also explain its rejection of Christianity whilst accounting for the definite attraction it exerts on people. Finally, and for all practical purposes more basically still, one might see the present futility of the missionary situation as resulting from the total and enduring lack of communication between two religions and two worlds,

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<sup>3</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, p. 353. This work will be quoted as The Christian Message in forthcoming references.

that of Islam and that of Christianity.

1. The Sequels of Islam's Encounters  
with Christianity.

There were moments in the history of the Muslim world that were decisive in determining which attitude Islam would adopt in its relations with Christianity both as a religion and as a social entity.

In Islam in a Christian Perspective Dr Kraemer discusses the question of Muhammad's contacts with the Christian tribes of Arabia<sup>4</sup>. During the Medinan period of the Prophet's life, his attitude towards the Christians took a turn for the worse, until the rupture was finally completed. As Dr Kraemer observes in that last work of his, it was borne in upon Muhammad that "the trinitarian way of speaking about God contrasted flatly with his lapidary monotheism, just as the christian worship of Jesus as God's son"<sup>5</sup>. Muhammad's condemnation of Christians and Jews alike had a definite influence on the spirit in which the Koran was written and

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kraemer's unfinished typescript entitled Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 44-45. This is the draft of a book at which Dr Kraemer was working at the time of his death. It numbers 271 pages to which must be added 40 sheets of notes and references. It was to have comprised four parts, only two of which were completed: Part I: "Historical Sketch of Islam. Origin and Development" and Part II: "Phenomenological Part."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

perforce deeply affected the way Islam felt about the Christian religion. From the very beginning the contacts between the two faiths were more in the nature of conflicts than of encounters, as is attested by the wars of conquest waged by the successors of the Prophet.

For the moment we should like to refer only to two major historic events that have made worse the opposition between Islam and Christianity, namely the Crusades and colonialism. One may look at those two moments in world history in the way that Dr Kraemer likes to look at them, that is to say within the larger setting of the encounter between East and West<sup>6</sup>. For the purpose of this paper, however, nothing prevents us from looking at those historical occurrences from the more restricted point of view of Islam's encounter with Christianity. It is true that the contact that took place in the Middle Ages between the Muslim world and Christian Europe cannot be reduced only to that of the Crusades<sup>7</sup>; yet it is equally true that those military ventures

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions. The Coming Dialogue, London, Lutterworth Press, 1960, p. 30f. We later refer to this book as World Cultures.

<sup>7</sup> In World Cultures, p. 32, Dr Kraemer shows four ways in which cultural contact was established between the world of Islam and the Christian West: the Muslim inroads into Spain, Sicily and Italy; the Crusades; the trading relations between the Venetian and Genoese Republics and the Far East; the missionary zeal of people like Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull, which led to the creation of centres of oriental learning.

had fateful consequences and entrenched the Muslim world in its view of the Christian West as Islam's sworn enemy.

In Agama Islam Dr Kraemer describes for the Javanese Christians, not without emotion, the aftermath of the Crusades.

He writes:

There are however consequences of this that must be deeply regretted, that is to say because of those battles the split between Christians and Muslims became even more dreadful whilst it gave rise to a great hatred. In the name of Christ, the King of Love and of Peace, the Christians went to war against the Muslims, so that the Muslims came to think of Christianity as a Religion of Hate.<sup>8</sup>

As he points out in World Cultures, "The memory of the Crusades may have faded out in the West; in the Muslim East it has not"<sup>9</sup>.

This fierce antagonism, going back to the Crusades and abetted by other bloody clashes well into modern history, was strengthened by what Dr Kraemer calls the Western invasion. That phrase describes accurately enough the second great moment of the encounter between East and West.

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<sup>8</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 1, Bandoeng, N.V. v/h A.C. Nix & Co., 1928, p. 52: "Akan tetapi ada akibatnja jang patoet sangat disesalkan, jaitoe oléh karena peperangan itoe pertjeraan orang Islam denga orang Maséhi mendjadi lebih hébat serta menimboelkan kebentjian jang besar. Demi Nama Kristoes, Radja Kasih dan Radja Damai, orang Maséhi melakoekan perang kepada orang Moeslim, sehingga orang Moeslim menjangkalah bahwa agama Kristen itoe Agama-Bentji."

<sup>9</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 103.

Its beginning can be dated about the year 1800 with Bonaparte's military foray into Egypt. This was but the first step of a movement that gradually led to the subjection by European powers of the whole of the Muslim world.

Writing in 1958, at a time when nationalistic fervour had reached its peak in such countries as had not yet achieved independence, Dr Kraemer had harsh words for the colonial powers' treatment of the Muslim countries. Here is how he speaks his mind on this matter in World Cultures:

This Muslim East's experience, through the modern Western Invasion, of the "Christian West" impressed upon its mind the picture of having to do with an organized assault of deceit and exploitation. Here lie some of the deep roots of what is at present called the virulence of Arab Nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

A year or two later, in his article on "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", our author would comment that the presence of Christian missions in the Muslim world under colonial occupation "had a distinct aspect of unnaturalness"<sup>11</sup>. He explains first of all that without the protection of the colonial governments the work of missionaries inside the House of Islam would have been unthinkable. He further points out that this work went on

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<sup>10</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 103-104.

<sup>11</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", in The Muslim World, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 1960, p. 249. Later referred to as "Islamic Culture".

"with entire disregard of the opinion of the Muslim population"<sup>12</sup>. However deep the sincerity and selflessness of missionaries, their efforts on behalf of the Gospel were considered by Muslims as "a camouflaged form of isti'mār" (i.e. imperialism or colonialism)<sup>13</sup>. This last remark is not new in Dr Kraemer's writings. One finds it already expressed in The Christian Message, where he further comments that "in the last decade this occurs with increasing vehemence"<sup>14</sup>.

It will be remembered that this work was carried out within the framework of colonial domination, a situation extremely humiliating for the Muslim nations which saw in their servitude an insult to the glorious past of Islam in the Near and Middle East. There was worse. During the first World War those territories became expendable pawns on the political chess-board of the Western Powers. Dr Kraemer is sure that the Arab nations in particular have not yet forgotten how they were led up the garden path. In an article on "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie" he writes:

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12 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 249.

13 Ibid.

14 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 275.

The great Powers, in the throes of their struggle with Germany, requested and used the help of the Muslim peoples whilst promising them independence for a reward. But underhand France, England and Russia were coming to altogether different agreements. Muslims have not forgotten that piece of deceit (...).<sup>15</sup>

As may be surmised, the historical encounters between East and West have resulted in increased feelings of resentment on the part of the Muslim countries in their attitude towards the West. These feelings extend of course to Christianity as such since to the Muslim mind, in which religion and community are indissolubly fused, Christianity and the West stand for one and the same thing. In that climate of relations soured by simmering indignation and pent-up hostility the Christian missions were doomed to failure from the outset. They did in fact reap very little to show for all their efforts. But there were other reasons besides that belied any hope of success.

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<sup>15</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme", in Revue de l'évangélisation, Vol. 16, No. 87, January-February 1960, p. 29. References to this article will quote only "L'Islam, une religion". "Les grandes Puissances, dans l'angoisse de leur lutte contre l'Allemagne, ont demandé et utilisé alors l'aide des peuples musulmans, en leur promettant l'indépendance comme récompense. Mais, sous la table, la France, l'Angleterre, la Russie concluaient des pactes tout différents. Les musulmans n'ont pas oublié cette tromperie (...)"

## 2. Islam's Conviction of Its Own Superiority.

A feeling of aversion or even hatred arising from events past and recent in history is not the only obstacle that the Christian mission faces when it comes into contact with Islam. According to Dr Kraemer there are other psychological factors at work. Perhaps the most insidious of these is the feeling of superiority nurtured in the Muslim conscience by the conviction that his community is God's chosen community and the best of all religious communities. This conviction Dr Kraemer puts down to Islam's very idea of theocracy. He writes:

In the first place it (i.e. the Christian mission) stumbles on the unbending conscience of superiority, the fruit of the secularized theocratic character of Islam which we have outlined earlier on.<sup>16</sup>

This notion of one's own excellence derives from the certitude of a pre-ordained choice, a choice which is based not on forgiveness but on privilege<sup>17</sup>. The pride Muslims take in their Umma comes out in many a passage of their literature. Dr Kraemer reminds us that a number of Muslim books begin with such praises as the following:

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<sup>16</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 29: "Ten eerste stuit zij op het onbuigbare superioriteitsbesef, vrucht van het boven-geschetste verwereldlijkt-theocratische kenmerk van den Islam."

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 16.

Praised be Allah, who sent the greatest of prophets in our midst, and who constituted his Umma the happy mean between two extremes, the best of communities, so that the members of that Umma will on the day of resurrection testify about the other communities.<sup>18</sup>

According to our author this feeling of superiority is further bolstered in the Muslim mind by the idea that Christianity only marked an intermediate step in God's revelation to man, this being now superseded by the revelation made to Muhammad. And he thinks the following simile describes in adequate terms how a Muslim reacts to the proselytism of Christian missionaries:

if a man wants to buy a motor-car he does not willingly purchase a 1904 model with all its out-of-date features, but desire (sic) a 1934 model with all the latest improvements.<sup>19</sup>

In his later writings Dr Kraemer remains persuaded that an impregnable superiority complex is one of the walls that bar the way to the penetration of the Christian message into the Muslim soul. He describes it as

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<sup>18</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 16, "Lof zij aan Allah, die onder ons gezonden heeft den grootsten der profeten, en die zijn 'oemma tot een midden tusschen twee uitersten, tot de beste der 'oemma's, gemaakt heeft, zoodat de leden dier 'oemma op den Dag der Opstanding getuigen zijn over de andere 'oemma's."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 30. Quoted in English by Dr Kraemer who only cites Jeffery as its author. Cf. "The Moslem Point of View", in The Moslem World, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 1936, p. 26. He means Dr Arthur Jeffery, although the article in The Moslem World is only signed 'Orientalist'.

that conviction anchored in the depths of one's conscience that the Islamic community is the best in the world, whatever its present situation, since it is the privileged community that Allah has given to the believers.<sup>20</sup>

For that reason "Islam arouses in its followers, notwithstanding its lack of depth, an unshakeable feeling of superiority and a consciousness of election"<sup>21</sup>.

It is only fair to add that Dr Kraemer is well aware that a feeling of superiority based on the presumed excellence of one's own religion is not a phenomenon peculiar to the Muslim soul. This kind of pride, with its retinue of contempt, prejudice and intolerance, thrives in all religious environments. Dr Kraemer reminds us that Christians adopted the same attitude towards Islam in the past. Here is how he describes the climate of the first

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20 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 35: "(...) la conviction ancrée dans les profondeurs de la conscience que la communauté islamique est la meilleure du monde, quelle que soit sa condition actuelle, car elle est la communauté privilégiée qu'Allah a donnée aux croyants."

21 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 21. This shortened title refers to two essays of Dr Kraemer's, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch", p. 15-27 and "Die Lage der islamischen Welt und die christliche Kirche", p. 28-36 in W. Holsten's edition of Neue Begegnung von Kirche und Islam, Stuttgart, Evang. Missionsverlag, 1960, 61 p. Owing to the unity of the two essays, it has been thought preferable to refer to them under the same heading. "(...) erweckt der Islam trotz der mangelnden Tiefe in seinen Anhängern ein unerschütterliches Superioritätsgefühl und Erwählungsbewusstsein (...)"

encounters:

There thus took place both in writings and in debates a dispute between Islam and Christianity that mostly led to strong antagonism. On the Christian side this happened in the main in a style of self-complacency and quiet contempt against the opponent, who replied in the same vein.<sup>22</sup>

But the point of Dr Kraemer's argument is that in the religion of the Prophet a feeling of superiority necessarily follows from Islam's theocratic ideal, or, in the words already quoted, it is "the fruit of the (...) secularized theocratic character of Islam"<sup>23</sup>. Instead of remaining a pure religion, Islam became a secular theocracy bent on achieving both religious and political power. For this reason Islam looks at the world as divided in two:

Theocratically speaking the world is divided in the dār al-Islām (the territory of Islam) and the dār al-harb (the territory of war). In principle the whole non-Muslim world is war territory to be subjected to the Muslim theocracy, by force if need be.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 33: "Zoo greep er dan in geschrifte en ook mondeling een discussie tusschen Islam en Christendom plaats, die meestal tot scherpe tegenstellingen aanleiding gaf. Van Christelijke zijde geschiedde dit over het algemeen in een stijl van zelfgenoegzaamheid en stille verachting jegens den tegenstander, die in denzelfden stijl antwoordde."

23 Ibid., p. 29: "(...) vrucht van het (...) verwereldlijkt-theocratische kenmerk van den Islam".

24 Ibid., p. 15: "De wereld wordt theocratisch verdeeld in den dar-al-Islam (het gebied van den Islam) en den dar-al-harb (het gebied van den oorlog). In principe is de geheele niet-Moslimsche wereld een, zoonoodig met geweld, aan de Moslimsche theocratie te onderwerpen gebied van den oorlog."

### 3. The God of Group Solidarity.

Whenever Dr Kraemer writes about Islam, he is at pains to bring home to his readers that it is not only a religious phenomenon, but also a social one. Islam is not a religion pure and simple, it is a cultural system in the strictest sense of the word. With its ideal of a secular theocracy, Islam has bred in its believers a social consciousness and a feeling of belonging the parallels of which are not to be found in other religions. These psychological factors work against the very idea of conversion to another faith. First of all in the individual faithful himself: how could he countenance the idea of renouncing the best of communities? It also works at the level of group solidarity where conversion is looked upon as a betrayal of collective interests.

In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer sees in this group solidarity one of the major reasons for "the exceptional stubbornness of Islam towards the efforts of Christian missions"<sup>25</sup>. He explains that

the secret of the iron rigidity of Islam is that its real "holy" and its real "god" is group solidarity, conceived with passionate religious directness. The "religion of Islam" is a sanctity apart; the unbroken unity of Islam the sacred treasure of the Moslem community and the Moslem individual.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 353.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

In De Islam als probleem our author spells out the dire consequences that used to befall those bold enough to defy "the unbroken unity of Islam". He writes:

Should a Muslim go over to Christianity in the old hereditary lands of Islam (North Africa, Asia Minor, India), then what awaited him as an apostate was either death through execution and poison, or complete boycott.<sup>27</sup>

This adherence to Islam, grounded first and foremost in group solidarity, accounts for a perplexing feature in the religious behaviour of Muslims. Loyalty to the religion of the Prophet appears to be independent of one's inner dispositions regarding its teaching or its prescriptions. Dr Kraemer describes this "truly remarkable fact"<sup>28</sup> as follows:

All over the Moslem world we know the curious and disquieting (disquieting because it affects one so strangely) phenomenon that the average Moslem, though he may be extremely lax as to the observance of his religious duties and even dissolute in his behaviour, is ready to die for the sake of Islam, or to kill a man whom he considers to be a defiler of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Kraemer, Dé Islam als probleem, p. 43: "Ging er eens een Moslim in de oude erflanden (Noord Afrika, Klein-Azië, India) van den Islam over tot het Christendom, dan wachtte hem als afvallige of de dood door executie en vergif, of totale boycot."

28 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 219.

29 Ibid. Same observation in "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 20-21. In his essay on "Islam in India Today", in The Moslem World, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1931, p. 166, Dr Kraemer had already remarked on this cast of mind of the Muslim believer. He writes, for instance, "One may even be, religiously speaking, lukewarm or indifferent or negligent, but one can be at the same time fervently loyal to the community".

This Dr Kraemer calls a riddle. And he contrasts this Muslim idiosyncrasy with the Western view that such witness is expected only of "men who are devoted believers in word and deed"<sup>30</sup>. Obviously, the Muslim attitude in which loyalty prevails over desire for truth presents the missionary with an impossible challenge. As Dr Kraemer remarks, "a very noteworthy fact in the Moslem world is that Islam as such, the religion of Islam apart from its content, is the object of fierce loyalty and absolute surrender"<sup>31</sup>.

#### 4. Islam's Rooted Rejection of Christianity.

Past encounters between Christianity and Islam have not brought them any nearer to each other. It is clear, on the contrary, that those events have widened the gap between the two worlds and the two religions. Moreover, an intense conviction of Islam's superexcellence and a fierce loyalty to its community make it all but impossible for Muslims themselves to even conceive of the idea of conversion. Towards Islam this would amount to abuse as well as treachery. These all are important motives accounting for the scanty success missionaries have reaped from their work amongst the Muslims. There is a further reason, the import of which is even greater

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<sup>30</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 220. See also De Islam als probleem, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

in this matter of evangelism. It is to be found in the Koran itself: as a religion Islam is openly - one might say officially - opposed to the Christian faith.

No doubt Muhammad's own experience in his dealings with the Christians of his time and environment is reflected in the Koran. We have already mentioned that Muhammad eventually broke off with both Jews and Christians. The important point to note about this rupture is that not only would it colour the teaching of the Koran; worse still, it would set the tone for all future relations between Islam and Christianity. Here is how Dr Kraemer describes this tragic circumstance:

The relations, at first harmonious, of Muhammad with Judaism and Christianity, turned to antagonism in the course of time and during his career as prophet. This was also deposited in the Koran. And this antagonism became Islam's basic feeling in regard to Judaism and Christianity.<sup>32</sup>

This feeling was moreover fostered by the teachings of Muslim theology down the centuries. During his stay in Java Dr Kraemer mentioned that point to the Christian leaders of the Dutch East Indies. He wrote in Agama Islam:

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<sup>32</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 17: "Es ist nämlich aus dem anfangs harmonischen Verhältnis Mohammeds zu Judentum und Christentum im Laufe der Zeit und in seiner Laufbahn als Prophet ein antagonistisches geworden. Das hat sich auch im Koran niedergeschlagen. Und dieser Antagonismus ist dann das Grundempfinden des Islam gegenüber dem Judentum und Christentum geworden."

A great number of 'ulamā in times past also taught that the other holy books, for instance the Bible, were false in their entirety and that they had now been cancelled after the book of the Koran had been sent down to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>33</sup>

In his booklet on De Islam als probleem our author insists on the disavowal by the Koran of some capital tenets of Christian doctrine, to wit the triunity of God, the divine sonship of Jesus, his passion and crucifixion, the notion of redemption and the truth of the Bible<sup>34</sup>. In Dr Kraemer's opinion both Islam as a system and the Koran's revelation contain "a wilful rejection of the main features of Christianity"<sup>35</sup>.

There follows in the Muslim mind a natural mistrust for the teachings of the Christian faith in general; all the

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33 Hendrik Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 2, N.V. Christelijke Boekhandel voor Ned.-Indië, 1933, p. 83: "Banjak oelama Islam didjaman-djaman laloe sama mengadjar bahwa Kitab Soetji jang lain-lain, misalnja Bijbel, palseo semoeanja dan djoega soedah dihapoeskan sesoedahnja Kitab Koerān ditoeroenkan kepada Nabi Moehammad." But Dr Kraemer knows that his book will find Muslim readers and he is careful to point out that outstanding Muslim scholars do not think like that any more and he refers to the Egyptian writer Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905). On Muhammad Abduh cf. Kraemer, "Eenige grepen uit de moderne apologie van den Islam", in Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde, Vol. 75, No. 1, 1935, p. 23 and World Cultures, p. 112.

34 Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 30.

35 Ibid.: "(...) met den Islam als stelsel en met de Koran als de gezaghebbende openbaring, tevens een welbewuste afwijzing van de centrale kenmerken van het Christendom gegeven ist."

more so because this mistrust focuses on matters connected with the most vital elements of Islam as a religion.

Dr Kraemer's explanation makes this quite clear. He writes:

The Muslim notion of God, of man, of what a prophet and messenger of God is, of what a book of revelation is, has for consequence that in the Christian concept of the Trinity, in the sonship of Christ, in his crucifixion and suffering, in the redemption and in the Bible, the Muslim does not only see a more or less serious aberration or heresy; rather this is for him despicable blasphemy.<sup>36</sup>

The Muslim idea of God, Jesus and revelation already embodied in the Koran has become part and parcel of the Islamic system as rejection of Christianity. So much so that Dr Kraemer does not hesitate to speak of a disease of Islam:

the rejection as much as the misconception are both, if one may put it that way, an essential characteristic of Islam, or a disease inherent in the make-up of that religion.<sup>37</sup>

In The Christian Message he stresses the same point with equal frankness when he writes:

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<sup>36</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 30: "De Moslimsche opvatting van God, van den mensch, van wát een profeet en gezant Gods, van wát een openbaringsboek is, heeft tot gevolg, dat de Moslim in de christelijke opvatting van de drie-einheid, van het Zoonschap van Christus, van diens kruisiging en lijden, van de verzoening en van den Bijbel, niet slechts een min of meer ernstige afdwaling of ketterij ziet; erger, dit alles is voor hem verachtelijke godslastering."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 31: "(...) de afwijzing zoowel als de misvatting, zijn beide, om het zoo eens uit te drukken, een wezenlijk kenmerk van den Islam, of een in de constitutie van dien godsdienst gegeven ziekte."

To reject Christianity is with Islam not merely the natural and intelligible reaction of every religion or world conception that has sufficient vigour in it to want to maintain itself; with Islam it belongs to its religious creed.<sup>38</sup>

#### 5. Islam, A Religion for "Natural" Man.

We may sum up in a few words what Dr Kraemer has told us so far. One finds in Islam a conviction of the excellence of the Muslim theocracy with its political goals of expansion and domination, a loyalty unwavering in its attachment to the community, together with a rejection of Christianity embodied in the very texture of the Koran. These unfavourable factors, compounded by an antagonism that grew over the centuries, are seen by Dr Kraemer as major hurdles in the path of the Christian message. He refers to them as "the three powerful

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<sup>38</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 354. A perplexing feature of Agama Islam in this respect is the strict silence observed by Dr Kraemer on Islam's teaching concerning Jesus Christ. He does bring out the differences between Islam and Christianity as religions, underscores how far apart Christians and Muslims stand in their respective attitude towards the Bible and the Koran and very often refers to Jesus as the Son of God. But under no circumstances will he quote the Koran or Muslim theology on Islam's rejection of Jesus Christ as Son of God, or any other passage for that matter dealing with the person of Jesus. In Vol. 1, p. 21, he mentions for instance S. 5: 18 which rebukes Jews and Christians for concealing part of the revelation they had received, but he leaves well alone the following verse 19 which brands as unbelievers those who say that God is indeed the Messiah, the son of Mary. One could think of one good reason or two for such discreetness, good, that is, from Dr Kraemer's point of view. But even a good guess is no evidence.

walls that run round the stronghold of Islam to guard it against the preaching of the Gospel: the religious, the cultural and the political"<sup>39</sup>.

Dr Kraemer takes us farther. With him it is possible to probe still deeper into the riddle of Islam's allergic reaction to the Christian faith. One could put it this way: what Christianity denies man is what attracts him in Islam. There is in the religion of Muhammad what appeals to tough natural instincts in man. Dr Kraemer would say that Islam was an easy religion well suited to the tastes of natural man. So he does in actual fact when he explains the nature of Muslim theocracy. He calls Islam "a religion that agrees perfectly well with the natural man"<sup>40</sup>. This is no passing remark as the following words from The Christian Message bear out: "Again and again one gets the impression that Islam is the religion of 'natural man' notwithstanding its strong religious elements"<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 31: "Drie geweldige muren omwallen aldus de vesting van den Islam tegen de prediking van het Evangelie: de godsdienstige, de cultureele en de politieke."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 21: "(...) het feit dat de Islam een godsdienst is, die zeer bij den 'natuurlijken mensch' past."

<sup>41</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 223. Dr Kraemer goes on to quote Pascal's Pensées: "Mahomet a pris la voie de réussir humainement, Jésus Christ celle de périr humainement" (Muhammad chose the way of human success, Jesus Christ that of human defeat)."

The phrase "natural man" in inverted commas is an obvious reference to I Cor. 2, 14. It will help to recall this verse, where the expression finds its explanation:

Now the natural man has no capacity for the affairs of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to comprehend them because they are investigated in a spiritual manner.<sup>42</sup>

Since Paul in the verses prior to this refers to things that were revealed by God through the Spirit, we may presume that Dr Kraemer, when using the phrase 'natural man', has in mind that man who, not yet enlightened by revelation, ignores the wisdom of God. Paul had earlier explained the nature of that wisdom according to which, he says,

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise men; and God chose the feeble things of the world to shame the mighty; and God chose the insignificant things of the world and the despised - the "nothings" - in order that he might nullify the existing things.<sup>43</sup>

In fact Dr Kraemer does hint at some of the things that the natural man may find in Islam. He mentions for instance might and power, as is consonant with the Muslim idea of a secularized theocracy, and he affirms that "in this way some overpowering instincts of the natural man, namely

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<sup>42</sup> Translation of W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, "I Corinthians", in The Anchor Bible, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1976, Vol. 32, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> I Cor. 1, 27-28 in Ibid., p. 153.

power and importance, obtain religious sanction"<sup>44</sup>.

One question naturally arises here which cannot be ignored: if Islam is the religion of natural man, are we justified in concluding that it is a naturalistic religion? The difficulty which this question brings up is that Dr Kraemer does not include Islam within the body of what he calls the naturalistic religions. He classifies it with Christianity and Judaism and insists in The Christian Message that "in the most emphatic sense of the word Islam is a religion of revelation"<sup>45</sup>. It is a prophetic religion because of "its genuine and original elements and structure"<sup>46</sup> which are based on the prophetic message of Muḥammad, and also because Islam can be understood "as a modified reflex of, and reaction upon, these two religions"<sup>47</sup>, that is to say Christianity and Judaism.

The fact remains nevertheless that Dr Kraemer has always been convinced that Islam had a good deal in common with the naturalistic religions, which he defines as religions

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<sup>44</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 28: "(...) daar hierdoor eenige beheerschende instincten van den natuurlijken mensch n. l. macht en 'Geltung' godsdienstige sanctie krijgen (...)."

<sup>45</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

of trans-empirical realization<sup>48</sup>. Islam's historical development did in fact tend to assimilate it with that kind of religious system. Significant in this respect is the following passage in which Dr Kraemer states that Islam

has become, like Roman Catholicism in Christendom, a great syncretistic body wherein are welded in one system theocratic and legalistic Islam, mysticism and various sorts of popular religion, in which the naturalistic vein of the primitive apprehension of existence shines through.<sup>49</sup>

In later writings Dr Kraemer reasserts that Islam is a religion for the natural man. In "L'Islam, une religion", he thinks that Islam cannot but be a legalistic religion owing to the Muslim notion of sin. Therefore, he writes, "in that respect, one may say that Islam very firmly asserts the legalism of natural man"<sup>50</sup>. Towards the end of his article he sums up his view in these few words: "Islam, a religion for natural man: from there comes in part the attraction it exerts on man"<sup>51</sup>. Our author comes to the same conclusion

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 143, note 1, where the author explains that "by the expression 'trans-empirical realization' is meant that man conceives all his efforts of meditation, religious practices, concentration, ascetism, etc., as means towards realizing and grasping the identity of his real self with divine reality."

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>50</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 11: "Sous cet angle, on peut dire que l'Islam affirme très fermement le légalisme de l'homme naturel." Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 35: "L'Islam, religion de l'homme naturel: de là vient en partie l'attrait qu'il exerce sur les hommes."

in his essay on "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" where he tells us roundly that "Islam must be characterized basically as a religio naturalis"<sup>52</sup>.

This statement seems at odds with Dr Kraemer's affirmation in his preface to Islam in a Christian Perspective that in the modern debate of Kerygma versus Religion

both Islam and Christianity are formally speaking in an identical position. That is to say that both take their basic stand in "Revelation" as their source and focus of orientation and direction. Again, formally speaking, both originate from a dynamic Kerygma, which is their point of gravity and which created distinct communities.<sup>53</sup>

The word 'formally', underlined by Dr Kraemer, is the clue we need to a solution of the apparent contradiction. Formally, that is to say, from the standpoint of what is essential or constitutive in it, Islam is a prophetic religion, a religion of revelation. From a concrete or empirical point of view, however, Dr Kraemer would see in it a natural religion. This, however, does not altogether solve the problem of the theological classification of Islam as a religion, should it be granted that the secular ideal of theocracy is also part of the Muslim kerygma.

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<sup>52</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 21: "Nach meiner Meinung ist der Islam im Grunde als religio naturalis zu charakterisieren (...)"

<sup>53</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 3<sup>2</sup>4. Dr Kraemer's italics.

But this problem need not detain us any longer. The important point to keep in mind is that for Dr Kraemer certain features of Islam, its ideal of world domination and its legalism in particular, bespeak its naturalistic bent and make it into a religion fit for natural man in the Pauline sense of the word. This goes a long way towards explaining why it exerts so much pull on people.

#### 6. The Lure of an Easy Religion.

Behind those affirmations of Dr Kraemer's there lies the desire to delve deeper into the mystery of Islam or, shall we say, into one small corner of that mystery: why does Islam attract so many people? The author of The Christian Message does not think that the sole reason is the way it fulfils man's natural inclinations. Over and above this, he argues that Islam is an easy religion because, as he writes, "in its main, genuine structure Islam is a simple religion"<sup>54</sup>, or again because "Islam in its constituent elements and apprehensions must be called a superficial religion"<sup>55</sup>.

In his later writings Dr Kraemer lays the stress on Islam's great simplicity, a feature which projects a lasting impression of facility when contrasted with the demands made

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<sup>54</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 216.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

by the Christian faith. This is borne out in a striking manner by the way Islam is spreading amongst those people that belong to less evolved cultures. A case in point is the African continent, as Dr Kraemer explains in the following passage:

It is one of the greatest obstacles, in Africa for instance, that Christianity, compared with Islam, impresses one as so infinitely complicated. Islam conveys a very straightforward impression.<sup>56</sup>

And in case one thinks that opinion biased, Dr Kraemer points out that Islam, too, sees itself in the guise of an easy religion. He brings in as confirmation a "significant sentence of the Koran: Allah has made his religion easy for you and not difficult"<sup>57</sup>.

An interesting illustration of this can be found in the confession of faith to which every Muslim is obliged to subscribe. Called the Shahāda, it consists of two short clauses proclaiming the oneness of Allah and the divine origin of Muhammad's mission. For Dr Kraemer the simplicity

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56 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 19: "Es ist eine der grössten Schwierigkeiten z.B. in Afrika, dass das Christentum, verglichen mit dem Islam, einen so unendlich komplizierten Eindruck macht. Der Islam macht einen sehr unkomplizierten Eindruck."

57 Ibid., p. 22: "Im Koran steht der bezeichnende Satz: Allah hat seine Religion für euch leicht gemacht und nicht schwer." It is written, for instance in S. 22:77: "He hath not laid upon you any straitness in religion."

of structure and content of the Muslim profession of faith accounts not a little for the success of Islam amongst tribal populations. He remarked on this in De Islam als probleem when he wrote:

The epigrammatic terseness with which these basic ideas (i.e. the unicity of God and his active care for man through the prophets) are expressed in the well-known Muslim credo: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah", has all through the centuries bred great recruiting power for Islam amongst peoples of lesser culture.<sup>58</sup>

There is further the fact that Islam demands little of its followers. This factor must be taken into account when discussing the future of Islam in Africa. In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer tries to view the situation "realistically" and assesses the advantages that accrue to the African who becomes a Muslim. He writes:

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<sup>58</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 3: "De epigrammatische gedrongenheid, waarmee deze grondgedachten zijn uitgedrukt in het overbekende Moslimsche credo: 'Er is geen God dan Allah en Moehammad is de gezant van Allah', heeft alle eeuwen door groote wervende kracht voor den Islam onder volken van minder beschaving ontwikkeld." See also The Christian Message, p. 216.

The Negro, by becoming Moslem, enters the religious, social, cultural and blood-community of Islam. Islam adapts itself very easily by its leniency to the current standard of Negro life. No long catechumenate is demanded; magical practices and ideas, so dear to the native mind, are easily incorporated; polygamy, that deep-rooted social institution in Africa, is even sanctioned and not at all combated as in Christianity.<sup>59</sup>

Not only does Islam demand little of its would-be followers, but adhesion to it does not call for the rending experience of personal conversion. Contrary to what should be found in the Christian believer, depth and fervour of faith, as conveyed by the New Testament, are not required by Islam. As Dr Kraemer explains, what Islam asks for basically is

the acceptance without arguing of the existence of Allah the Almighty, of the infallible character of the Koran, the uncreated word of Allah, and the conviction anchored within the depths of one's conscience that the Islamic community is the best in the world (...).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 364. Earlier on in his book, p. 269, Dr Kraemer had given as one of the reasons for its expansion "the very moderate religious and moral demands that Islam makes of those who want to enter its fold."

<sup>60</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 35: "La cohésion et la solidité de l'Islam en tant que corps religieux ne reposent donc pas sur la profondeur et l'ardeur de la foi dans le sens occidental et chrétien du mot, mais sur l'acceptation sans discussion de l'existence d'Allah Tout-Puissant, du caractère infallible du Coran, Parole créée d'Allah, et sur la conviction ancrée dans les profondeurs de la conscience que la communauté islamique est la meilleure du monde (...)"

Nor is it necessary to abide strictly by all the legal prescriptions of Islam in order to behave as a passionate Muslim. This last is not the least puzzling feature of Islam, as Dr. Kraemer points out more than once in his writings, for instance in the following excerpt from "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten":

There are thousands of Muslims who daily neglect the prescriptions of their religion and who in reality do not fare so well by the standards of orthodoxy; even then they are very passionate Muslims.<sup>61</sup>

And our author concludes that "what is decisive is manifest loyalty towards Islam"<sup>62</sup>.

As one hears Dr. Kraemer speak of "thousands of Muslims" in such terms, one may well feel uneasy. His words however should not be interpreted to imply that Muslims in general are incapable of a truly genuine commitment to their faith, a commitment with deeper roots than mere sociological adherence to a religious community. This construction would

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<sup>61</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 20-21: "Es gibt Tausende von Moslems, die die Vorschriften ihrer Religion jeden Tag vernachlässigen, die eigentlich nach den Massstäben der Rechtgläubigkeit nicht gut wegkommen, die aber sehr leidenschaftliche Moslems sind." Our author had already remarked on this in The Christian Message, p. 219-220: "Europeans call this 'Moslem fanaticism' and feel extraordinarily uneasy about this enigmatical enthusiasm for a faith whose rules are constantly neglected and transgressed." Cf. also Kraemer, "Islam in India Today", p. 166.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 21: "Entscheidend ist offenbar Loyalität gegen den Islam". Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 6.

clash with other statements in which our author praises the intense faith and heartfelt piety of countless Muslims he himself knew. The point he is trying to make is not that Muslims are shallow believers, but that one puzzling aspect of Islam is the common occurrence in the same man of personal religious indifference side by side with fanatical devotion to Islam.

#### 7. The Encounter that Never Took Place.

So far Dr Kraemer has presented us with various reasons to explain the resistance that Islam opposes to the Gospel and its success as a challenger of Christianity. Generally speaking, the question was approached from a consideration of Islam itself: its history, its faith and its socio-cultural character. It would be both unfair and untrue to suppose that the missionary problem Islam sets for the Christian Church has now been fully unravelled. It must be added that the fulfilment of the missionary mandate of the Church was made all the more difficult by the distorted picture of Christianity the West offered to Islam and by the failure of the Christian Church to show itself as a true Church.

In other words, the difficulties the Christian Church struggles with in its efforts to introduce Jesus Christ to Islam cannot be all put down to the singular character of Islam. There is by all accounts in the Muslim world ignorance

of the true nature of Christianity and the wrong ideas about its teaching with all the prejudices attendant to that situation. But it must be owned that the responsibility for a great part of that ignorance and misunderstanding can be laid at the very door of Christianity. This Dr Kraemer did stress a number of times in his writings. He complains in particular that the bickerings and squabbles between the Churches and their various missionary agencies "obscure to a lamentable extent the real character of Christianity"<sup>63</sup>. He does not try to gloss over that scandalous state of affairs in which he sees a "deeply humbling fact", as he explains in his article on "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy":

The deeply humbling fact remains that the Muslim world (specifically, the Muslim, Arabic-speaking world) in its whole history has never had a chance to see the Christian Church as she is according to her true nature and calling, but has always been presented with lamentable caricatures.<sup>64</sup>

Dr Kraemer thinks that even Muḥammad never got to set his eyes on the true face of the Christian faith. As he puts it, "Muḥammad never had the opportunity to really experience what the Gospel was all about"<sup>65</sup>.

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63 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 363.

64 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 251. Dr Kraemer's italics.

65 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 16: "Mohammed hat nie eine Gelegenheit gehabt, wirklich zu erfahren, worum es im Evangelium ging."

We could cull a long string of quotations from our author's works, all labouring the point of Islam's ignorance of what the Christian faith really means and insisting on how much the Christian Churches and their missionary organizations must answer for that situation. However, our prime interest does not lie with the whys and wherefores of that predicament but with its tremendous implications. If it is true that Muhammad never got to know the Gospel and if it is true that the Muslim world never knew better than a mangled version of the Christian faith and a twisted image of the Church, then the striking conclusion is forced upon us that Christianity and Islam have never really met. Over and above that particular strain in Islam's character that makes it impervious to the influence of the Gospel, the paradox stares one in the face that Christianity and Islam, notwithstanding their many clashes, never enjoyed the benefits of a genuine encounter.

In his pamphlet on De Islam als probleem Dr Kraemer describes how the conflicts of Islam first with the Eastern Church and then with the Byzantine Empire made all true rapprochement in the religious field absolutely impossible<sup>66</sup>. He welcomes the growth of Christian communities in the midst

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66 Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 34-35. The rapprochement (benadering) theme recurs on p. 34, 36, 38, 42 and 44 of this publication.

of Indonesia's large Muslim populations since this will force the Church to face the eventuality of an encounter with Islam<sup>67</sup>. At that early date, 1937, our author was already quite clear in his mind that no true encounter had yet taken place between Islam and Christianity. In The Christian Message he mentions this in more general terms and writes that "the real meeting between Christianity and the Eastern systems of life has not yet taken place, and is still a matter of the future"<sup>68</sup>.

When Dr Kraemer wrote that book he was mostly concerned with the way relations between Islam and Christianity had become fraught with prejudice and hostility. He was insistent that contact should be renewed; he spoke of meeting, encounter and rapprochement. However, his understanding of the situation took a different turn over the years, and he spoke more and more in terms of communication. This obviously was one of the questions to which he had given much thought during his term in office as director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey from 1948 until 1955. It is no mere coincidence that in 1956, at the invitation of Knox College in Toronto, he had lectured on the "Communication of the Christian faith". These lectures were to appear in book form

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67 Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 47 and 48.

68 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 52.

under the same title later in the year. In that book Dr Kraemer draws a clear line between "communication of" and "communication between". He shows that the communication of the Gospel to the world calls in the first place for communication between the Church and the world, or, to put it differently, for a true dialogue between the two<sup>69</sup>.

It is that facet of the missionary problem that arrests Dr Kraemer's attention in his later writings on the Christian Church's attitude towards Islam. In the light of his reflexion on communication, he came to see that the lack of true dialogue was the core of the problem the Christian Church had to solve in its relations with the Muslim world. There never had been any communication between Christianity and Islam: how could there be communication of the Gospel?

Dr Kraemer's conviction on this point explains the main thrust of the three articles he wrote about 1960: "Islamic Culture", "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" and "L'Islam, une religion". Each essay stresses, in some way or other, the fact that never as yet had there been a genuine dialogue between the Christian Church and the House of Islam. Here is how Dr Kraemer in one of his articles analyses the situation:

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69 Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 11-13.

Before coming to the quick of this problem, we must recall a number of facts without which we cannot get the right idea about the contacts between the Muslim world and Christianity. We must realize that for centuries those two worlds were kept apart by a real tragedy of misunderstandings (...).<sup>70</sup>

For this reason one should not think any more in terms of approach but in the light of communication. That is the point our author tries to put across when he observes that "it is not a matter of approach, but of communication, of true dialogue, of truly coming into contact with one another"<sup>71</sup>. Significantly enough, the word communication in this last quotation affords our author an opportunity to refer his reader to his Communication of the Christian Faith<sup>72</sup>.

That the root problem between Islam and Christianity is after all one of communication - or the lack of it - is the underlying postulate of Dr Kraemer's surprising article on "Islamic Culture". After inveighing against

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<sup>70</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 27: "Avant d'entrer dans le vif de ce problème, il faut nous rappeler un certain nombre de faits sans lesquels nous ne pouvons nous faire une idée juste des contacts entre le monde musulman et le monde chrétien. Il nous faut réaliser que pendant des siècles, ces deux mondes ont été séparés par une véritable tragédie de malentendus."

<sup>71</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 29: "Nicht auf approach, sondern auf Kommunikation kommt es an, auf wirklichen Dialog, und wirkliches In-Kontakt-Treten miteinander."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

the clumsiness and blindness with which Western public opinion, not excluding the opinion and attitude of responsible politicians and statesmen, reacts to the present situation and problems of the Muslim world (...)<sup>73</sup>,

he affirms that the same blame applies "to the Christian Churches and their missionary concern in relation to the Muslim world"<sup>74</sup>. The times have changed, Dr Kraemer argues, and therefore

we are led to the conclusion that the past, age-long relationship of antagonism, unilateral closedness of mind, and communication by monologue, has turned into the possibility and necessity of a new relationship of mutual interdependence (material and cultural) and of genuine human encounter and open dialogue.<sup>75</sup>

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This study thus ends upon the tragedy that has for centuries plagued the relations of Islam and Christianity, to wit the lack of communication between two worlds and two faiths. It is easy enough to find reasons why the Christian mission should have in general made so little headway in the Muslim world. The writings of Dr Kraemer offer a good sampling of them, most of which we have just reviewed. Not that they all carry the same weight. The very nature of

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73 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 245.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., p. 250. Dr Kraemer's italics.

Islam as a social, political and religious body explains why, from an inner point of view, the sturdiest obstacle still remains group solidarity: But if one looks at the essential purpose of the missionary mandate, which is the communication of the Gospel, it is equally clear that the greatest hurdle has always been the impossible dialogue. From Dr Kraemer's writings again one gathers that the chances of a true encounter have from the earliest days kept receding into the realm of fanciful dreams as the two religious solitudes waxed more and more stubborn in their isolation. This isolation was both a sequel and a cause: a sequel of earlier attitudes and misunderstandings; a cause for further estrangement and prejudices.

One may well ask: which of the two worlds stands more to blame? Our choice of texts and our analysis of them may leave one with the impression that for Dr Kraemer Christianity comes off second best, that it should be made accountable for most of the mess. In fact, the purpose of these pages was not to present a dispassionate evaluation of responsibilities, but to find out with Dr Kraemer why it was that Islam offered so much resistance to the Gospel. Still it is true to say that in this matter responsibilities ought to be shared by both parties. When our author pores over the problem of Islam's imperviousness to the Christian faith, he well knows that from the very beginning the relations

between the two became marred by contempt, hostility and even violence. He is also aware that before very many years had elapsed one side had to fight tooth and nail for its survival on the very soil of Europe. Nevertheless, Dr Kraemer's contention is that in the long-drawn conflict between the two fraternal enemies, to use his own words, one of the two brothers chose to forget that he had received far more than the other. And so he reminds the Church when he writes the following words: "When one considers however the treasure that the Christian Church enjoys in the Gospel, this must be said: of him to whom more was given more shall also be demanded"<sup>76</sup>.

Note that Dr Kraemer is now speaking of the Christian Church and Islam, not of missionaries and Muslims. In fact Dr Kraemer uses both ways of speaking when referring to the missionary duty of the Church. But in these last paragraphs dealing with encounter and dialogue the emphasis has obviously shifted from the individuals to the group, from the missionary to the Church, from the Muslim to Islam. When it comes to communication our author sees the problem in the broader setting of the relationship between two religious communities: the House of Islam and the Church of Christ.

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<sup>76</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 35: "Gezien echter de schat, die de Christelijke Kerk in het Evangelie bezit, moet er gezegd worden dat van hem, wien meer gegeven is, ook meer geëischt zal worden."

Now an intriguing question crops up. Indeed, what has the missionary been doing all the time if there never was any communication between Islam and the Christian faith? The question does have a point. But it makes sense only in a context where the overriding importance of communication has been fully grasped. Although Dr Kraemer had known all along that there had been no encounter between the two religious groups, it is only later that the full implications of a lack of communication between them dawned upon him. He then saw how futile the proclamation of the Gospel becomes when there exist no avenues of communication. Hence Dr Kraemer's insistence in later articles that the first concern of the Church should be that of taking up the dialogue with Islam. These late articles in Dr Kraemer's life, from what we have already seen of them, give us an inkling of possible surprises to come on the subject of the mission to Islam.

For we have now arrived at the central question of this research: Dr Kraemer's ideas on the mission to Islam. A survey of theological divergences between Islam and Christianity, a look at the present difficulties of Islam, a study of the factors pitting Islam against Christianity provide us with all the essentials needed for a thorough understanding of Dr Kraemer's teaching on the mission to Islam, both in the early and classical garb that the Christian world knew until the dismemberment of the colonial empires

and later in its renewed and updated guise of a search for true dialogue between two great religions.

## CHAPTER VI

### A TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE MISSION TO ISLAM

A study of Dr Kraemer's teaching on the Christian mission to Islam, if it is to be limited in scope to just what the words 'Christian mission to Islam' convey, supposes that one is already cognizant of a number of indispensable elements. The Christian mission to Islam is but one sector of the Christian mission in general and a survey of that sector requires that one should first be familiar with Dr Kraemer's global vision of the Christian mission. Because of the well-defined boundaries of the study we propose to make here, we suppose that this important foundation has already been laid.

On the other hand, the mission that is considered in these pages is directed to one particular religious system, namely Islam. This again calls for preliminary information of a special kind because Islam, unlike other non-Christian religions, has had since its inception links with Christianity that not only spring from historical encounters and conflicts but arise from the influence wrought on its founder by the Judaic and Christian traditions. These links thus go back to the very genesis of the Muslim faith. One is then led to seek Dr Kraemer's views on Islam, not all of them but only such as shed light on his perception of the missionary approach best

suites to the Muslim people. We think that this is ensured in an adequate manner once one has found out how Dr Kraemer assesses the theological differences between Islam and Christianity, what he thinks of the present situation of a system that is not only a religion, but a social and political entity as well, and what explanations he offers for the notable resistance of the Muslim peoples to evangelism. For the purpose of this study it is again taken for granted that such information being otherwise to hand is not necessary here and that we may now proceed with Dr Kraemer's description of the traditional approach to Islam.

Our use of the word 'traditional' is the translation of the French word classique which Dr Kraemer himself used in one of his later writings. In his article on "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie" he spoke of "the classical missionary method, that is to say direct evangelization in the usual sense of the word"<sup>1</sup>. Our own word 'traditional' refers to Dr Kraemer's 'classical'. The meaning conveyed is that of the methods or approach generally adopted by Christian missionaries in their dealings with all non-Christian religions.

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<sup>1</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme", in Revue de l'évangélisation, Vol. 16, No. 87, January-February 1960, p. 4. Further references to this article quote only "L'Islam, une religion". "(...) la méthode missionnaire classique, c'est-à-dire l'évangélisation directe dans le sens usuel du mot (...)"

Notwithstanding important differences in theory as well as in practice between the various Christian Churches, they all had one goal in common: the spread of the Gospel by bringing about the conversion of non-Christians. This too was the objective of the missionaries working in the Muslim world and was shared by Dr Kraemer during his stay in Indonesia and even afterwards. How he perceived this traditional approach to Islam in its practical implications and applications is the subject discussed in this chapter.

For the purpose of this essay we shall focus our attention on two periods in Dr Kraemer's life. The years that he spent in Indonesia are quite important to us since they give us the opportunity of looking at a missionary in action in the midst of Muslim populations. This missionary would later draw upon his own knowledge and experience and set forth in The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World<sup>2</sup> and other writings practical principles for missionaries to follow in their approach to Islam. Nobody will contest the interest and relevance of observing what that man did before scanning what he wrote. From Dr Kraemer's own example and from the advice he gave his fellow workers in Indonesia we will try to draw a picture of his own missionary attitudes.

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<sup>2</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p. Henceforth referred to as The Christian Message.

This will be done in the first part of our study.

After his stay in Indonesia our missionary published a number of writings in which he again dealt with Islam, in particular in some long passages of The Christian Message, in the pamphlet entitled De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem<sup>3</sup> and in a couple of articles published later. The period covered by those writings extends from 1937 to 1953. Their contents will be studied in the second section of these pages.

1. Dr Kraemer's Missionary Years  
in the Dutch East Indies: 1922 to 1935.

Dr Kraemer spent twelve years in the Dutch East Indies where his official duties consisted in acting as adviser to the Bible Society whose efforts aimed at making the Scriptures available to the local Christians in some of their most important vernaculars. In the course of his work and owing to his remarkable talents Dr Kraemer was soon asked for his counsels on a number of problems the Dutch Reformed Church missions were faced with in that part of the world. Islam was not the least of the challenges the Christian Church had to meet in the East Indies. Not only was it widespread throughout the Dutch territories, but it was slowly

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<sup>3</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1938, 48 p. Quoted in future references as De Islam als probleem.

awaking from its long sleep and showing signs of increasing self-assurance and militancy. On the other hand, the Christian communities looked like lost islands in a sea of Muslim followers and tended to become ghettos in hostile surroundings.

From the very first moment of his stay in Java, Dr Kraemer's attention willy-nilly was drawn to the plight of Christian communities having to witness to their faith in the midst of a Muslim majority. At the request of his employers he lived with some of those communities, reported on their conditions and recommended which concrete measures should be taken. Much of this practical advice is to be found in the reports published years later under the title of From Missionfield to Independent Church<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, our author had himself to deal with Islam directly. He attended meetings, was asked to speak at gatherings, met with important leaders, visited Muslim communities and was even involved in religious debate. It will be interesting not only to listen to the man but to find out how he behaved in his relations with Muslims. In this respect Dr Van Leeuwen's book Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk is full of valuable

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<sup>4</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, From Missionfield to Independent Church, London, SCM Press, 1958, 186 p. Referred to in future references as From Missionfield.

information<sup>5</sup>.

A study of Dr Kraemer's dealings with Muslims during his stay in the East Indies brings out four major traits which best describe his personal approach to Islam. First of all he never relented in his efforts to improve upon his acquaintance with the mentality of the local populations. Secondly he always showed respect for what those people held sacred. Thirdly he displayed a genuine willingness to serve. Finally, and this was perhaps his major preoccupation, he sought after every way of bridging the gap between the Christian and Muslim communities.

#### A. The Importance of Knowing Indigenous Islam.

When Dr Kraemer arrived in Java, his theoretical knowledge of East Indian Islam was already considerable. The research that went into his dissertation on a sixteenth-century Muslim writing from Java shows how familiar he had already become with the mystical tendencies of local Islam. All the same, he never deluded himself that his understanding of indigenous Islam was now complete. When asked to look into the situation of the Christian missions working with the Batak and Sundanese people, he paid especial attention

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Th. van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk, Amsterdam, W. ten Have, 1959, p. 25-30: "Ontwakend nationalisme"; p. 30-33: "De Islam als zendingsprobleem". In future references we shall quote only Hendrik Kraemer.

to the large Muslim communities established amongst those people. His observations found their way into detailed accounts of his inquiries: "Report of a Tour Through the Bataklands"<sup>6</sup> and "Report on West Java"<sup>7</sup>. In those reports he exhibits his intense interest for the peculiar features of local Islam. Watching him travel over various mission fields in the East Indies, one is reminded of his own words about the missionary being "one who walks around with seeing eyes in the world in which he wants to be a witness to Christ"<sup>8</sup>.

It is important to note, however, that in his opinion an understanding of native Islam could only be profitably reached if one already had a sound knowledge of Islam in general. Here is what he writes on this point in his report on the Batak lands:

Without study and knowledge of Islam in general it is impossible to attain a true perception and correct evaluation of the actual forms of Islam with which we have to deal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 43-72. Section III of this report is entitled "The Mohammedan Batak lands", p. 55-61.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 96-117. Section IV of the report is entitled "Islam, the Crowning Element of Sundanese Adat", p. 112-117.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

He thought this piece of advice held good for local Christians as well and with this in mind he designed the lessons he wrote on Islam during his stay in the East Indies. As he explains in his introduction to Volume I of Agama Islam, which appeared in 1928,

This book, which gives an account of the religion of Islam, was written with a view to informing the students of the Christian Teachers' Training School together with the intention of broadening the views of educated Christians concerning Islam. This is necessary since the contacts of Christianity and Islam are becoming more and more frequent in daily life.<sup>10</sup>

If the notes on Sumatran or Javanese Islam in our author's reports seem so close to life and so penetrating in their insights, much of it may be put down to his unusual gifts for observation. But only a thorough knowledge of Islam in general can explain the soundness of his advice and the aptness of his suggestions to his fellow missionaries.

In a later writing he relates how one day in Java he broke the spell of hostile silence that greeted him in a Muslim institution by reading aloud the title of an Arabic

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<sup>10</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Agama Islam, Djilid jang pertama, Bandoeng, N.V. v/h A.C. Nix & Co., 1928, "Pendahoeloean" (Introduction): "Kitab ini jang merentjanakan agama Islam, dikarangkan dengan maksoed hendak memberikan penerangan kepada peladjar-peladjar sekolah goeroe Kristen serta poen akan memperloeaskan pemandangan orang-orang Maséhi terpeladjar, tentang agama Islam. Itoe perloe, sebab perzaoealan Maséhi dan Islam, makin lama makin rapat didalam kehidoepan sehari-hari."

publication he had noticed lying on the table. This anecdote, he concludes, shows the importance of knowing the Arabic language and Islamic theology in order to achieve true contact with Muslims on the human and religious planes<sup>11</sup>.

B. The Respect of Religious Sensibilities and the Claims of Truth.

One of the suggestions contained in Dr Kraemer's Indonesian reports concerns the missionary's reaction towards Islam's claim that Muhammad is God's Prophet. Commenting on a booklet on Islam printed by the missions in the Batak lands and alluding to the protests that had led to the banning of that publication by the Dutch authorities, Dr Kraemer remarks with merciless realism:

It is neither our task nor our duty to say, as is done on pp. 10 and 11, that Mohammed is not the true prophet. Our witness on this point is merely taken as slanderous and offensive. It does not stimulate reflection, but resentment. We cannot say this to a Mohammedan, we must let him discover it for himself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kraemer, "L' Islam, une religion", p. 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 61. This is just what Dr Kraemer tried to do in his Agama Islam, where he records what he thinks are the facts of Muhammad's life and leaves it to the reader to decide whether his claim to be God's messenger was true. In the 2nd edition (third printing) of his book, Agama Islam, Djakarta, Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1952, 308 p., revised by Dr C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze since "the original writer was not able to make the revision himself" (Introduction: "... penarang asli tak berkesempatan untuk melaksanakan sendiri pembaharuan itu...), the question

The first principle in this matter, Dr Kraemer points out, is "to show our awareness of the fact that we are speaking of what is sacred to others"<sup>13</sup>.

For this reason he offers the same sort of advice to the Christian East Indians for whom his Agama Islam was meant.

He writes about Muhammad:

These days Prophet Muhammad is much beloved and honoured by the Muslims. They say that he is indeed the most perfect creature. Although we cannot agree with them if we keep in mind his behaviour as referred to above, yet in our contacts with Muslims we should always remember never to go to the length of hurting their feelings.<sup>14</sup>

Our author's sensitivity for other people's feelings, the Muslims in particular, his respect for their religious

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12 (cont'd) whether Muhammad was a prophet of God is put fair and square on p. 24. There is a difficult question, it is answered, and it cannot be solved by reason alone, but through faith: "If a man believes that Muhammad was a prophet in truth, then for that man they were indeed divine sayings that came forth from his mouth" (ibid.: "Kalau orang pertjaja Muhammad sesungguhnya Nabi, maka untuk orang itu firman ilahilah jang dikabarkan oleh Muhammad). But those who did not share such belief could not be expected to agree.

13 Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 61.

14 Kraemer, Agama Islam, Vol. 1, p. 30: "Pada masa ini Nabi Moehammad sangat ditjinta dan dipermoeliakan oléh orang Moeslim. Dikatakannja ialah machloek jang teroetama. Meskipoen kita ta'dapat menjetoedjoei meréka itoe kalau kita teringat kelakoeannja jang terseboet diatas itoe, maka dalam pergaoelan dengan orang Moeslim haroes kita ingat selamanja, djangan sampai menjakiti hati meréka itoe."

convictions, and his genuine recognition of the many greatnesses of Islam opened to him the hearts of a large number of Muslims. Yet it must be granted that such qualities, important though they were, would have been of little avail had they not gone hand in hand with a knowledgeable familiarity with the religious world of Islam.

How far should the respect of Muslim susceptibilities go? Should it be cultivated at the expense of truth? Dr Kraemer did not think so. He was convinced that the truth, however unpalatable, had a right to come out into the open. Van Leeuwen rightly remarks that "when he was convinced of the strict need for the sake of truth to mention certain things which were less pleasant for Muslim ears, he would still quietly go his way through good or ill repute"<sup>15</sup>. Actually, there was a good deal of indignation stirred by Agama Islam in certain Muslim quarters<sup>16</sup>. Our missionary had himself written in one of his reports:

It is certainly true that, even if we write about Islam with the greatest possible objectivity and with appreciation of its appreciable points, protests will always be heard. This consideration can never reduce us to complete silence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 32-33: "Waar hij overtuigd was van de strikte noodzaak om der waarheid wil bepaalde dingen te zeggen, welke voor moslimse oren minder aangenaam waren, daar ging hij rustig onder goed of kwaad gerucht zijn weg."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 61.

This last quotation of Dr Kraemer's allows his concern for truth to shine through, but this concern never did away with the restraint needed in matters so delicate as religious sensibilities. The need for restraint partly explains his reluctance to go into public controversy. On this point his attitude contrasted sharply with the aggressive militancy of another missionary, Dr S.M. Zwemer, the well-known founder of The Moslem World<sup>18</sup>. Yet Dr Kraemer himself agreed that in certain circumstances controversy was simply unavoidable since eschewing it would be mistaken for weakness on the part of the Christians and would strengthen the prejudices of non-Christians.

Van Leeuwen relates an interesting instance of his hero's involvement in open debate with Muslims. Notwithstanding his conviction that in such confrontations "one could perhaps win the argument but would for a certainty lose the man"<sup>19</sup>, Dr Kraemer one day accepted a challenge from the very active Muslim organization Ahmadiyya to face them in a public argument. He took up the glove only because a refusal

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18 Cf. Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 30.

19 Ibid., p. 33: "(...) aangezien deze vorm van met elkander omgaan naar zijn overtuiging wellicht de discussie kon winnen doch met zekerheid de man zou verliezen."

would have been construed as a sign of "intrinsic weakness"<sup>20</sup>. But it may be gathered from our missionary's general rule of behaviour in this matter that such face-to-face encounters in front of an audience were - and should remain - the exception in a missionary's activity.

C. The Christian Ideal of Disinterested Service.

Dr Kraemer's acceptance of the Ahmadiyya's invitation was only inspired by his desire to serve the cause of the Christian missions in the East Indies. A willingness to be of service was one of the deeper traits in our author's personality and remained a permanent feature of his life. As early as 1921 he had expressed in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation what would be the golden rule of his future labours. In the last words of his introduction he outlines the spirit that he wishes to bring to the great work of the mission. He writes:

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<sup>20</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 33: "(...) een weigering zeker als innerlijke zwakte zou worden uitgelegt (...)" . Only a man of Dr Kraemer's powers could have accepted such a challenge. The Ahmadiyya was a missionary movement from India and its representatives knew no Javanese. The debate lasted two nights and Dr Kraemer had to move in three languages, none of which his own: English, Arabic and Javanese, since he had to interpret for his Javanese audience the English and Arabic of the Ahmadiyya people.

May it be granted me in the service of this great work always to be directed by the disposition which I can express in no better way than by referring to a familiar axiom of our forefathers: "Laborare et servire necesse est, vivere non necesse est".<sup>21</sup>

Was he ready to serve not only the missions but Islam as well? The many friends he could boast among Muslims in the East Indies were in fact won over through a spirit of service which never denied itself. And it must be boldly stated that in his missionary dedication Dr Kraemer was quite willing to serve Islam too, as he in fact did when he agreed to help with his advice a group of young Indonesians intent on publishing a periodical destined to stir the interest of the Javanese people for their own culture. Before long, however, Dr Kraemer had to defend himself against the charge and calumny that in so doing he had an axe to grind. He was indignant. He replied that he had never used the periodical in question for Christian propaganda although "pleas have very often appeared in it in behalf of Islam"<sup>22</sup>. As a convinced Christian he only wanted to be of

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<sup>21</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw, Inleiding, vertaling en aantekeningen, Leiden, P.M.W. Trap, 1921, "Inleiding": "Moge het mij gegeven zijn in dienst van dit grootsche werk steeds geleid te worden door de gezindheid, die ik niet beter kan uitdrukken dan met een toespeling op een bekende kernspreuk onzer voorvaderen: 'Laborare et servire necesse est, vivere non necesse est'."

<sup>22</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 27: "(...) daarin menig keer een pleidooi is verschenen voor de Islam en nooit voor het Christendom."

service and his principle of action would always be the following:

I will readily cooperate to the growth of the indigenous movement, help to make it functional, strong and genuine, whenever people ask for my collaboration. Never have I offered myself.<sup>23</sup>

His readiness to lend a hand could best be described as service without strings attached. Van Leeuwen very aptly sums up the spirit of his personage when he comments that only in the way adopted by Dr Kraemer

could the notion ripen that the Mission is something else than a piece of Western propaganda and that the Gospel calls to disinterested service towards a people for the sake of that people and not in order to use it for Christian objectives.<sup>24</sup>

#### D. The Pressing Need for True Communication.

Taking a closer look at Dr Kraemer's way of dealing with the Muslims and calling to mind the sort of advice he gave missionaries and Christians alike during his stay in the East Indies, one soon finds out that he is motivated by

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<sup>23</sup> Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 27: "Mijn beginsel is en zal steeds blijven: ik wil gaarne medewerken aan de ontwikkeling der inlandse beweging, haar mede helpen weerbaar, sterk en zuiver maken, wanneer men mij om medewerking vraagt. Nooit heb ik mij aangeboden."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 25: "Alleen langs deze weg kon het besef rijpen, dat Zending iets anders is dan een stuk westerse propaganda en dat het Evangelie oproept te belangeloze dienst aan een volk om der wille van dat volk en niet om het voor christelijke doeleinden te gebruiken."

one overriding preoccupation: how to bring about some sort of mutual understanding between the Muslims and the Christians. His desire to know more about the local people, the care he took not to hurt, the disinterestedness of his assistance: all these attitudes were inspired by one fixed idea, that of laying the foundations for true communication between the two religious communities.

During his missionary years in the East Indies he soon realized the lack of communication between the two groups. In his report on the Sundanese missions he deplores the fact that the Christians have become estranged from their predominantly Muslim environment, a situation which forced them to live in isolation and deprived them of all influence<sup>25</sup>.

One or the other of the suggestions made by Dr Kraemer in relation with the Sundanese people is worth mentioning here because they show how concerned he was that the local Christian communities should break off the bonds of isolation and learn to communicate with their Muslim compatriots. He notes for instance that such great days as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost should be marked by special celebrations, say a festive meal which Mohammedans could be

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, "Report on West Java", p. 104-105 and 115. This isolation was caused by faulty missionary policy and by the particular circumstances of Sundanese society.

invited to share<sup>26</sup>. This would foster friendly relations between the two groups. Moreover, and this is Dr Kraemer's second suggestion, these friendly concourses would afford a wonderful opportunity for the recital of the Christian saga in much the same manner that the Muslims are wont to do on the day of Mulud (Muhammad's birthday). In this way one important goal would be achieved, to use Dr Kraemer's own words: "The Gospel will at least be heard"<sup>27</sup>.

And yet he entertained no illusions about the immediate success of what he proposed. He was realistic enough to see that the problem of communication between Christians and Muslims, made worse by centuries of mutual disparagement, was not amenable to a quick solution. In his "Report on West Java" he writes with a note of sadness: "A Christian minority and a Mohammedan majority living together in free and frequent social intercourse is something that will not happen soon"<sup>28</sup>.

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26 Cf. Kraemer, From Missionfield, "Report on West Java", p. 127. In this matter certain Churches found themselves at a disadvantage. Dr Kraemer remarks, perhaps with gentle irony: "Protestant Christianity (at least of the Dutch variety) expresses itself in sober church meetings. On feast days there is a barely perceptible change in this soberness" (ibid.).

27 Ibid., p. 133. The word mulud just mentioned stands in Malay for the Arabic mawlūd.

28 Ibid., p. 127.

He appears even less hopeful regarding the possible evangelization of the Sundanese Muslims through the efforts of the local Christianity. But if those congregations could be activated, he wrote, one might be "firmly convinced that as a result unexpectedly large forces towards christianization will flow from these humble congregations in the future"<sup>29</sup>.

## 2. Dr Kraemer's Writings from 1937 to 1953.

The foregoing consisted mostly of practical conclusions derived from a study of Dr Kraemer's own attitudes in his dealings with Islam and from the advice addressed to missionaries in various reports during the twelve years he spent in Indonesia. After he had left the mission field in 1935, his interest for Islam continued to show in a number of his writings. Two of these deserve special attention for a knowledge of Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam, De Islam als probleem and The Christian Message. The two publications contain a reflexion which is based not only on considerable theoretical knowledge of Islam but on intimate contact with one living variety of Islam, that of Indonesia, and on close observation, through the press or personal trips, of the life of Islam in other countries. We now propose to consider these two publications together with two other

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<sup>29</sup> Kraemer, From Missionfield, p. 126.

articles that Dr Kraemer still managed to write whilst he was the director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey near Geneva.

A. The Missionary as Point of Contact with Islam.

In The Christian Message, written a year or two after Dr Kraemer had come back from the Dutch East Indies in 1935, one is presented with the broad lines of a missionary approach to Islam<sup>30</sup>. As may be expected in a book intended for a very large public of missionaries, the treatment of our topic is limited to general observations. Moreover, it reflects the uncertainty that was troubling the Western nations just before World War II.

In his book our author sets forth for the missionaries to Islam recommendations as well as warnings. Some of these recommendations concern the missionaries themselves while others are addressed to the Christian Churches at large. The warnings deal with pitfalls to be avoided or illusions to be guarded against and are meant especially for the foreign missionaries.

Dr Kraemer would not have the missionary believe that his suggestions will work as a magic wand. The fact is now well established, he writes, that "through all the ages, Islam has been (...) the teacher of patience"<sup>31</sup>. Islam has

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30 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 353-365.

31 Ibid., p. 353.

also taught the missionary another lesson: that he must be sustained in his work by selfless devotion. To quote Dr Kraemer's own words about that great religion:

Its great function has been, and will probably continue to be for the present and for the immediate future, to remind the Christian Church that Christian missions, if they will be really Christian, that is to say if they spring from the apostolic obligation towards a divine commission, are not primarily driven by motives of spiritual conquest or success, but by the urge towards faithful and grateful witness to Christ.<sup>32</sup>

One is reminded here how little importance Dr Kraemer sets by the apparent success - or failure - of the missionary task.

Our author's further remarks are general. He draws the missionary's attention to two points which, he says rather apologetically, "are not mentioned here as mere pious, edifying talk, but as hard, matter-of-fact conditions"<sup>33</sup>. He insists that Islam as a social system holds so fast to its structure and as a religion so patently rejects the major elements of the Christian faith, for instance the divine filiation of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, that "the prime condition of the approach to Islam is faith, hope, love and endurance that never wear out, and

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32 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 353.

33 Ibid., p. 355.

of which love is 'the greatest of all' (I Cor. xiii)"<sup>34</sup>.

Dr Kraemer's mention of love is no mere observation by the way. He brings his full meaning home by explaining further that "fear or disgust or hatred of Islam"<sup>35</sup> would radically handicap the missionary. Should the missionary experience such feelings, our author suggests that "he does better to go immediately home and never come back"<sup>36</sup>.

The second point raised by Dr Kraemer is a call to the Church on behalf of its messengers labouring in a Muslim environment: they must be made to feel that they have the support of their Church. He writes:

The Christian Church must stand behind her ambassadors in this difficult field with prayer and loving remembrance to a degree quite different from what is practised now.<sup>37</sup>

The two points made by Dr Kraemer have nothing very original about them. Their importance lies in the particular conditions in which the missionary to Islam finds himself

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<sup>34</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 354.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 354-355.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 355. In his 1933 "Report on West Java", From Missionfield, p. 132, Dr Kraemer had spoken in much the same vein. He wrote: "If somebody objects that not everyone has an interest in people, then my only answer is: a missionary, whether exceptionally or moderately gifted, who has no interest in people, should not be a missionary. He is like a carpenter who is not interested in carpentry."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

most of the time. Unlike his colleagues reaping a rich harvest in other fields he very seldom sees the success of his efforts; unlike the other missionaries he is very often treated as the odd man out in mission circles. Consequently, what is needed even in the best of missionary situations: faith, hope, love, perseverance and the support of the Church, becomes indispensable requisites for the mission to Islam with its special problems.

Some of these problems arise from those features of Islam in which its links with Christianity become apparent. Dr Kraemer mentions three pitfalls into which the missionary might be lured by this specious likeness. He therefore warns him against the temptation to present the Christian faith as the fulfilment of Islam's expectations. Dr Kraemer will not budge from his stand that there can be no true points of contact between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions. To be sure, there are to be found in the Muslim faith elements that were borrowed from historical Christianity. But these have now assumed through their assimilation by Islam "a wholly different character and tendency"<sup>38</sup>, so that "these elements are not half-truths in relation to Christianity, they simply belong to another plane of

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38 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 355.

religious apprehension"<sup>39</sup>. It is easy to see how this view falls in perfectly well with our author's opinion about religions being totalitarian wholes. The threads in them cannot be parted from one another owing to their tight weave nor pulled from the aggregate which is shot through with "the same apprehension of the totality of existence"<sup>40</sup>.

Dr Kraemer sounds another note of caution. The missionary should guard against an intellectualist exposition of the Christian faith as a set of doctrinal statements to be assented to. This would be playing into the hands of Muslim doctrinarianism. As Dr Kraemer points out, "Islam itself is creedal and doctrinal to the core"<sup>41</sup>. To advertise Christianity as an assortment of teachings "is to rouse the militantly intellectualist spirit of Islam"<sup>42</sup>, all the more so because Islam directly rejects some of those teachings. On the other hand this would only confirm the Muslims in their misconception of Christianity as just another doctrinal system, thereby fogging the dynamic features of Christianity which they never had the chance to meet in the course of

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39 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 356.

40 Ibid., p. 146.

41 Ibid., p. 356.

42 Ibid.

history<sup>43</sup>.

This explains why Dr Kraemer, although he did on one or the other occasion accept a public debate, does not favour that kind of contact with Islam. According to him, the drawback to such debating bouts is precisely that they move strictly within the intellectual sphere. In his small book on De Islam als probleem, written at about the same time as The Christian Message, he explains his point of view further:

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 357. As he develops his argument Dr Kraemer writes: "In the course of the ages Islam has lived together with the Eastern Churches, which are all the most appalling instances of petrified doctrinalism and ritualism" (ibid.). This statement reflects Dr Kraemer's impatience with an intellectualist conception of the Christian faith and his preference for the more sober forms of Christianity. In its generality, however, it is a harsh comment on the situation of the Eastern Churches struggling for survival in the midst of the Muslim world. That they have managed to survive at all - whereas others have disappeared long since - is an indication of their attachment to Jesus Christ in the face of ostracization and veiled persecution. In his 1946 Preface to The Christian Message Dr Kraemer confessed that he had been unable to revise his work. We like to think that, had he had the opportunity to do so, he would have altered his statement about the Eastern Churches to show less indignation and more comprehension.

The difficulty with the religious joust is and remains that it keeps the mind tied up within the intellectual sphere, which is from the religious point of view the least important, and consequently it obfuscates the divine but revealing and saving folly of the Gospel, unwillingly but unavoidably.<sup>44</sup>

Not to mention that such debates should only be handled by experts, otherwise they will provoke the Muslims to "justified anger and even tighter imperviousness"<sup>45</sup>

If the missionary cannot find stepping stones to Islam in a common doctrine, can he perhaps bank on mysticism? The quest for mystical union with God is not uncommon in Islam and there do exist numerous fraternities whose avowed purpose is to lead the faithful or the initiates to the highest peaks of religious experience. Could the Muslim's mystical search for God provide the missionary with another tack in his efforts to reach out to Islam?

Dr Kraemer's answer is not favourable. First of all, one must know that mysticism in Islam "is wholly an alien

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<sup>44</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 42: "De moeilijkheid van het godsdienstig toernooi is en blijft, dat het de geest binnen het intellectueele, d.i. het voor den godsdienst minst-wezenlijke vlak gevangen houdt, en daardoor de goddelijke, maar ontdekkende en reddende dwaasheid van het Evangelie ongewild, maar onvermijdelijk, verdonkeremaant."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 43: "(...) het intellectueele toernooi op godsdienstig gebied in geestelijk en intellectueele-onbekwame handen alleen maar rechtmatige ergernis en sterker afgeslotenheid bij den Moslim opwerkt."

growth in this religion<sup>46</sup>. Moreover mysticism, although it is a constant phenomenon in the religious world, cannot be reduced to a single basic explanation which would apply to all religions. It must be agreed then, Dr Kraemer writes, that

in the problem of the relation of Christianity to the non-Christian religions, one must never explain the similarity of the universal mystical attitude, which is to be found in all religions, by a similarity between the fundamental religious apprehensions of the different religions (for example, Christianity and Islam; Christianity and Hinduism or Buddhism).<sup>47</sup>

The flowers of mystical life bloom in both Christianity and Islam, but they are not from plants that have grown in the same soil. And the missionary must not be naive enough to believe that the Muslim who has met Allah in the mystical encounter is now ready to accept the God of Jesus Christ.

So much then for Dr Kraemer's cautionary advice. In his dealings with Muslims the missionary should not pin his

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<sup>46</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 358.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 360. Dr Kraemer's doctoral dissertation, Een javaansche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw, contains a good deal about Muslim mysticism. The same topic was also dealt with in his article "Geloof en Mystiek", in De Opwekker, Vol. 79, No. 7, July 1934, p. 300-343, although we found that article interesting more for what it says on faith than for its comments on mysticism (mostly of the Javanese kind). Cf. also the unfinished typescript left by Dr Kraemer in 1965, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 234-253: "The Place of Mysticism". To the end Dr Kraemer remained persuaded that mysticism was alien to Islam, p. 252; not even his admiration for Ghazzālī could bring him round to changing his mind, p. 249.

hopes on the fact that elements of historical Christianity have become embedded in Islam, or that some of its doctrines show troubling similarities with the Christian faith, or that Islam is pervaded by a strong current of mysticism. As for the positive suggestions contained in Dr Kraemer's teaching, they tend first of all to do away with suspicion and secondly to find a common basis for communication. Islam itself may provide such a basis, not as a doctrinal system but as a religion.

What Dr Kraemer advocates primarily is a truly personal and human contact. The Muslim, he writes, should not be seen

as a non-Christian but as a fellow-man with the same fundamental needs, aspirations and frustrations, whose religious experience and insight are as worth while as the missionary's, simply because he is a living human being.<sup>48</sup>

The phrase "not as a non-Christian" is important. Although it seems to push the idea of conversion into the background, the remark is fully justified from a psychological point of view. The privative quality of the very term 'non-Christian' inevitably points to something that the missionary has got and that the other has not. Dr Kraemer insists on a contact where the missionary meets his interlocutor in a spirit of absolute and unrestricted equality.

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<sup>48</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 356.

If one moves from the area of psychological attitudes to that of the nature of the exchange between the missionary and Islam, Dr Kraemer would not favour doctrinal controversy, as we have already mentioned. The exchange should revolve round more vital or existential topics such as the religious life of man.

This does not mean that the missionary is expected to allow ambiguities or errors about the Christian faith to persist in the minds of his Muslim friends or enquirers. Concerning those elements that the Koran borrowed from the Christian faith and often wrenched out of shape in the process, it is suggested that the missionary should give "a positive and restricted religious witness"<sup>49</sup>. There is little more that the missionary can do. As Dr Kraemer explains,

The one thing that every missionary and Christian who preaches the Gospel in the "house of Islam" has to do with unwearying perseverance in regard to these elements borrowed from historical Christianity is to explain patiently what, according to Biblical realism, these elements really mean, and wait for the results.<sup>50</sup>

With the mention of biblical realism we are brought back to the sphere of the purely religious where the reflexion is fixed on the history of God's saving deeds for man and on man's answer to God's offer of reconciliation.

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<sup>49</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 356.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Thus does the Bible offer the best line of attack while it skirts the quagmires and quick sands of scholastic discussions. This at least is Dr Kraemer's view. Here is how he puts it in The Christian Message:

The personal contact itself must show how one has to open the world of the Bible in every concrete instance, by beginning at the centre or at the periphery of Christian truth or somewhere between.<sup>51</sup>

There are neither hard and fast principles nor rules of thumb for this. Every encounter with the Muslim believer is a specific case and must set its own pace.

It is at this point that the mystical tendencies of Islam and the spiritual experiences of Muslims may come into their own after all. Those tendencies and experiences will indeed help the missionary keep the conversation focussed on the religious, and specially on man's personal relationship with God. Dr Kraemer must have felt torn between his personal mistrust for any form of mysticism, let alone his conviction that mysticism is basically foreign to Islam, and - one may think - his own experience, when he admitted that "among mystically-minded people it is possible to find the greatest number of individuals with whom genuine religious

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<sup>51</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 356.

intercourse is possible on the basis of common humanity"<sup>52</sup>. Although the existence of strong mystical trends in Islam does not get the missionary closer to the heart of the system itself, it may get him nearer to the hearts of the Muslim mystics. With such people the exchange can be kept centred on what is essential in religion since, as Dr Kraemer points out,

The mystics with their concentration on "God and the soul" have removed the axis of religious life from group-solidarity to communion with God in the purely religious sense of the word.<sup>53</sup>

When the dialogue hinges on the great questions of spiritual life, there are undoubtedly benefits to be derived from it by both sides. For the moment however Dr Kraemer appears more concerned with what impact such conversations may have on the unbending structure of Islam. He writes that one of the best ways

to soften this rigid system is to encourage in all kinds of ways personal religious life in Islam, in which all emphasis falls on a life of religious and moral fellowship with God.<sup>54</sup>

Should the missionary achieve only that in his daily contacts with Muslims, he could still rejoice in having brought those

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52 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 358. In the few pages of his book where the author deals with the missionary approach to Islam, i.e. pages 353 to 365, four are devoted to the question of Muslim mysticism: p. 357-360.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

people closer to what our author understands by biblical realism.

So far Dr Kraemer has given us the outline of a direct missionary approach, the main points of which consist in setting right certain misunderstandings of the Christian faith, drawing upon the Bible to set forth God's acts of salvation and meeting the Muslim in general on the common ground of "religious and moral fellowship with God." He also mentions, although summarily, the indirect approach which expresses itself through various services, specially in the fields of education and health, and in the production of religious literature. These he calls "other means of opening up a way for the Gospel"<sup>55</sup>. He refers in particular to the American University in Beyrouth and the Oriental University in Cairo<sup>56</sup>. Although the results of such activities are hard to assess, they may be seen as work of preparation for the Gospel. Indeed, with a number of missionary agencies this kind of approach has become synonymous with the very mission to Islam, Dr Kraemer writes, and "came then to be seen mostly as preparatory work through the activity of unselfish love

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<sup>55</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 43: "(...) andere wegen om een weg voor het Evangelie te banen."

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 43-44.

and silent, indirect influence"<sup>57</sup>. He also notes that the Roman Catholic missions have felt less interest in the direct witness to the Gospel amongst Muslim people although they have been active in education, the press and various charitable activities. It is his impression that the mission to Islam, owing to its difficulty, has stirred little enthusiasm amongst R.C. missionaries<sup>58</sup>.

What did Dr Kraemer really think of the indirect approach to Islam? In his general theory of mission he insists on the importance of service. For him evangelism of a necessity includes diakonia, and he agrees that "one may

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<sup>57</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 44: "Zending onder Moehammedamen (sic) ging men dus voornamelijk zien als v o o r b e r e i d e n d werk door de daad der onzelfzuchtige liefde en der stille, indirecte beïnvloeding." (Underlined by Dr Kraemer).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 45. A notable exception, according to Dr Kraemer, is the work of the White Fathers founded by Cardinal Lavigerie. He writes of them, ibid.: "They are moved by the desire directly to win the Muslims for Christ. How difficult this is clearly shows in the fact that, notwithstanding their zeal, they have as a rule of action: first win their confidence through years of contacts and all the while stick only to religious exchanges whenever this appears advisable. Most of the time they will do this only after long personal influence." (Hien beweegt het verlangen naar het directe winnen van Moehammedanen voor Christus. Hoe moeilijk dit is, wordt wel hieruit duidelijk dat zij, ondanks hun bewogenheid, als werkregel hebben: eerst vertrouwen winnen door jarenlangen omgang, en daarbij alleen godsdienstige gespreken voeren, wanneer dit geraden blijkt. Meestal doen zij het eerst na lange persoonlijke beïnvloeding.)

highly value the indirect significance of all that work"<sup>59</sup>. But he would not like missionaries to expect too much from such activities. He reminds them in sobering tones that

one of the crosses that the mission must patiently accept for Christ's sake is that, apart from a few exceptions, the Muslim world seldom considers as disinterested what is intended as such.<sup>60</sup>

The reasons for this are not altogether difficult to imagine. Dr Kraemer mentions two in particular, the one connected with the colonial situation of the Muslim world and the other deriving from Islam's natural tendencies. Owing to the political and economic ambitions of Europe "all trust in the unselfishness of European institutions is nipped in the bud"<sup>61</sup> he says. On the other hand, he adds, "Islam's own politico-religious instinct - whose power we have always tried to demonstrate - makes it little apt to perceive the real objective of the mission"<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 44: "De indirecte beteekenis van al dit werk mag men m.i. hoog aanslaan." Cf. also Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 364.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.: "(...) één der kruisen, die de Zending geduldig om Christus' wil moet aanvaarden, daarin bestaat, dat behoudens enkele uitzonderingen, de Moehammedaansche wereld datgene, wat als onzelfzuchtig bedoeld is, zelden als zoodanig aanneemt."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 45: "(...) het geloof in de onbaatzuchtigheid van iedere Europeesche instelling in de kiem verstikt (...)"

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.; "(...) het eigen politiek-godsdienstige instinct van den Islam, welks groote kracht wij steeds hebben willen aantoonen, hem weinig geschikt maakt voor de erkenning van de eigenlijke bedoeling der Zending."

As can be seen from Dr Kraemer's words, the conditions in which the missionary bears witness to Jesus Christ in the House of Islam, whether in a direct or an indirect manner, are far from easy. He must be on his guard against a number of practical errors, he must not set his hopes too high and he must be prepared to see the sincerity of his intentions suspected. Dr Kraemer's tone may be negative, but he is not calling the mission to Islam in question. What he has in mind is that the missionary toiling in Muslim lands should never lose sight of the harsh realities he has to contend with. And if it is positive advice that the missionary wants, he will do well to meditate on the following words addressed to all those who like him are active in that difficult field. In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer writes:

A diligent cultivation of personal contacts on a high religious and moral plane of human openness and Christian humility; and the ministry to secular needs in a spirit of disinterested service are everywhere the roads that still lie open, although in view of the present situation these approaches will demand much ingenuity and tact.<sup>63</sup>

For all his importance in the work of evangelism, it would be wrong to see in the foreign missionary the only

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63 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 363-364. J.T. Addison on p. 319-320 of his article "The Presentation of the Christian Message to Muslims", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 30, No. 3, July 1941, p. 315-323, deals with the personal approach of the missionary in terms very similar to those of Dr Kraemer.

witness of the Christian faith in Muslim countries. The Christian communities and Churches that live in those countries must also carry out their missionary mandate towards the non-Christian world. We shall now consider what Dr Kraemer has to tell us about the duties of the Church towards Islam.

B. The Churches as True Pictures of Christianity.

A consideration of the difficulties that stood in the way of the missionary in his efforts to bring the Gospel to the House of Islam had perforce to take into account the very situation of the Christian Churches. After all, it was Dr Kraemer's deepest and staunchest conviction that the mission was the affair of the Church as a whole and not just of a few selected people volunteering for what others did not care to do.

Unfortunately some of the most humiliating difficulties came from the Churches themselves. Their divisions were reflected in the very attitudes of the missionary organizations in the field, being more often than not at loggerheads with one another or working at cross purposes, and more interested in the success of their own pet projects than in the building of the Christian Church. The sad paradox with the missionary agencies was, on the one hand, their deep-seated desire to bring about the conversion of the Muslims

and, on the other, their unwillingness or sheer inability to present Islam with the compelling picture of Christian unity.

The divided Churches were not only the European Churches locked in theological combat ever since the days of the Reformation. There was also "the rivalry between the quarrelling Eastern Churches"<sup>64</sup> mentioned by Dr Kraemer in The Christian Message. Those Churches lived in the very midst of the Muslim populations and were surviving in what our author regarded as an utter state of stagnation. The missionaries who saw how fruitless their efforts turned out to be with the Muslim people felt that they could at least bring some help to the Eastern Churches. Dr Kraemer suggests that they went "to work in the stagnating Christian Churches in the East in order to increase the possibilities of rapprochement in the future"<sup>65</sup>. In The Christian Message<sup>6</sup> Dr Kraemer calls this work "the revivification of the petrified Eastern Churches"<sup>66</sup>. As might be expected, this kind of outside interference was resented by the local hierarchies which

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<sup>64</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 363.

<sup>65</sup> Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 44: "Men (...) ging, tot vermeerdering der mogelijkheden van benadering in de toekomst, in de verstarde Christelijke Kerken in het Oosten werken."

<sup>66</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 361. The point is arguable. Dr Kraemer's is one charitable way of looking at it. Anyhow, this kind of poaching was common practice between missionary agencies and certainly not productive of ecumenical feelings.

frowned upon "the reformatory zeal kindled in their flock by the missionaries"<sup>67</sup>. This activity resulted in "the building up of Evangelical Churches composed of Eastern Christians"<sup>68</sup>.

In brief, wherever Christianity appeared there thrived brotherly disharmony. The way things were, it would have been senseless to expect missionaries to achieve marvels.

Dr Kraemer complains with some bitterness that:

This discord undermines the forces that are already so pathetically exiguous over against the strong citadel of Islam, and, besides, evokes much justified criticism. It obscures to a lamentable extent the real character of Christianity.<sup>69</sup>

Dr Kraemer saw those lamentable divisions as a major obstacle in the way of any endeavour to bring Christ to the Muslim world. In 1937 already, the man who for years would be closely connected with the ecumenical movement felt that unity between the Christian Churches was the necessary basis to a missionary approach to Islam. In The Christian Message he concludes his survey of the religious situation in the Near and Middle East with the following recommendation:

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67 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 361.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., p. 363. For Dr Kraemer unity belongs to the true character of Christianity. In a later publication, A Theology of the Laity, London, Lutterworth Press, 1958, p. 133-135, he explained the biblical connexion between the mission and the unity of the Church.

In other words the practical demonstration of a deep and transforming ecumenical spirit in the missionary bodies and in the quarrelling churches is one of the most needed and certainly most effective approaches to Islam.<sup>70</sup>

With these words Dr Kraemer brings the problem of the approach to Islam into a much broader setting. The reflexion that went into the writing of The Christian Message led him to consider what part the Christian Church as a whole should play in the mission to Islam. He saw what responsibility devolved on the local Churches as witnesses of Christ in the Muslim countries. From that point on, this would be the aspect of the mission to Islam he would privilege. A few years later his ecumenical toils and travels would confirm his thinking along the same course.

In 1951 Dr Kraemer went to Asia on behalf of the World Council of Churches. He published a report of his visit in The Ecumenical Review under the title, "On Tour Through South-East Asia"<sup>71</sup>. In his article his conviction on the responsibilities of the indigenous Church in a Muslim country comes again to the fore in forceful terms. In Pakistan he met with Church leaders and prominent Christians. Here is how he sums up what he told them:

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70 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 363.

71 Hendrik Kraemer, "On Tour Through South-East Asia", in The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 1952, p. 117-130.

I therefore very strongly urged the point that a Church in a Moslem country has to be profoundly aware of Islam's special claim on Christian charity, arising both from the special relation in which Islam stands, through its origins, to Christianity, and from the many unfortunate experiences it has had of the Christian world.<sup>72</sup>

This means in practice, Dr Kraemer further explains, that Christians should stop considering "the Moslem first and foremost as a narrow-minded fanatic"<sup>73</sup>. This is particularly important for a Church whose life is totally immersed in Muslim surroundings. What it must do, he insists, is "to overcome this natural inclination and regard the Moslem as primarily a man, a man for whom Christ died"<sup>74</sup>.

These are not empty words. Did Dr Kraemer feel obliged to utter them by what he saw during his visit in Asia? In any case, bigotry and prejudice must surrender to "Islam's special claim on Christian charity" and to the fact that Christ also died for Muslims. Then only will positive contacts be brought about between Islam and Christianity.

In this context, does the importance of the foreign missionary fade into nothingness? Not really, although his presence and collaboration will have to be redefined. When Dr Kraemer looks at the situation obtaining in Pakistan and

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72 Kraemer, "On Tour Through South-East Asia", p. 120.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

in other countries in similar circumstances, he sees the missionary's contribution as a service directed mainly to the local Churches with and within which the apostle carries out his work. He explains that the function of the Western missions towards the Churches in Pakistan is mainly

that of constantly reminding them that it is the indigenous Church itself which is called upon to evangelize Pakistan, and that therefore the main instruments for that purpose are not the missionaries and mission institutions, however important their work may be, but first and last the evangelizing Church, which is a living community.<sup>75</sup>

A year later, in 1953, Dr Kraemer wrote another article on "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia"<sup>76</sup>. In this short essay Dr Kraemer draws an important distinction between two categories of Muslim countries in non-Communist Asia. The distinction is not altogether new under our author's pen since we already find it mentioned in earlier writings of his, for instance in De Islam als probleem<sup>77</sup>. There are two Muslim blocks of nations in non-Communist Asia. The first one is made up of the countries of the Near and Middle East. This group of nations, Dr Kraemer

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<sup>75</sup> Kraemer, "On Tour Through South-East Asia", p. 120.

<sup>76</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 42, No. 2, April 1953, p. 144-150.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Kraemer, De Islam als probleem, p. 43. Note that in that quotation Dr Kraemer includes India in the old hereditary lands of Islam.

writes, "is dominated by two main facts. It is an Islamic world, and it is a world consisting of young, newly formed states, wholly unstable and full of volcanic possibilities"<sup>78</sup>. That was the first fact. The second is even more important. Our author stresses the difference between this block and other Muslim countries. Together with North Africa, he writes, the nations of the Near and Middle East stand for

the most deeply Muslim-impregnated part of the Islamic world. Islam is not only its religion, but it is there that Islam developed into the vast theological, socio-religious and cultural system which has enabled it to play so great a rôle in human history since the early Middle Ages.<sup>79</sup>

In other words, and to use Dr Kraemer's own phrase, those are the cradle lands of Islam.

This background offers little in common with that of the other two Muslim countries of free Asia, i.e. Pakistan and Indonesia. Drawing upon history again our author calls his readers' attention to the fact that

Islam was introduced into them as a finished system and grafted upon the entirely different soil of the Hindu religion (as in India) or of primitive religion blended with Indian cultural and religious penetrations, Hindu or Buddhist (as in Indonesia).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

The picture presented by Christianity in each of those two areas shows marked differences too. In the Near and Middle East the bulk of Christianity is made up of the ancient Eastern Churches; in the other two Muslim countries, Pakistan and Indonesia, one comes across recent Christian congregations and new Churches who all owe their origins to the labours of foreign missionaries in modern times. As may be foreseen, the possibilities for the Churches to carry out their missionary obligation will not be the same in those various territories.

Dr Kraemer recognizes that "missionary work in the Near and Middle East labours under increasingly severe restrictions"<sup>81</sup>. The Eastern Churches now find themselves in countries that are determined to plan their lives in accordance with Muslim principles directly independent status allows them to do so. This puts the Eastern Churches in a difficult and delicate position. Dr Kraemer wonders how they intend to face up to the challenge. He asks them whether it will be "by complaining, by yielding, by accommodation, by introvert solidarity, or by an inner revival and a courageous witness in life and word"<sup>82</sup>? His phrasing of the question carries with it its own answer. He discerns in the

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<sup>81</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 147.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

severe and precarious circumstances of the Orthodox Churches an appeal directed to them, an invitation, as he says,

to break loose from their age-old provincial imprisonments, and to find each other in a true ecumenical encounter, to concentrate on spiritual revival and on witness and service to the community at large.<sup>83</sup>

The ecumenical theme has been resumed again as may be seen, but this time with the motif of service in counterpoint. This definitely has a familiar Kraemerian ring, and one is brought back to the first pages of The Christian Message where our author reminds the Church that "it is called to constant witness and service"<sup>84</sup>.

Dr. Kraemer's suggestions to the young Churches in Indonesia and Pakistan are quite the same. But he insists also on warning those communities against what has been happening to older Churches placed in conditions similar to theirs. Islam, he explains,

from its earliest days, has always tolerated Christian communities in its midst, on certain conditions. But it has a strong tendency to make such communities static and introvert.<sup>85</sup>

When our author makes this observation, he has in mind the Christian communities in Pakistan where the problem for the

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<sup>83</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 148.

<sup>84</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 25.

<sup>85</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 149.

Church is not only one of growth but one of existence as well. Both missions and Churches must read the signs conveyed by their circumstances and ought to "shape their spiritual strategy accordingly"<sup>86</sup>.

Never the one to hover in haziness, Dr Kraemer immediately comes up with two pieces of practical advice. What it amounts to, he writes, is that

the Church must combat every temptation to acquire a defensive and minority complex; further, that it must grasp fully the fact that the agency whose task it is to evangelize Pakistan and to claim it for Christ is the Church itself, and that missionaries from outside, however necessary and successful, are subsidiary.<sup>87</sup>

The warning that the Christian communities must at all costs forestall and ward off a ghetto-like frame of mind is not new with Dr Kraemer. One finds it clearly sounded in the reports of his missionary years in Indonesia. His convictions in this regard were strengthened by his study of the life of the Eastern Churches in Asia. In the case of Pakistan his warning is all the more stringent since the missionary responsibility for that country belongs to the local Christian communities.

One will find in Dr Kraemer's understanding of the Church the inner logic that links the two facets of this

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<sup>86</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 149.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 149-150. Dr Kraemer's italics.

admonition. The mission is for the Church a vital need. Should the Church ignore it, it would lose touch with its very reason for being and would stand condemned slowly to wither and wilt. Without the mission it folds up upon itself and lingers in stagnation within the bulwarks of its own isolation. The mission is precisely what keeps its dynamism going and growing and flowing forth. Conversely, the idea of mission does not easily arise in a Church that is shut in upon itself. Obviously Dr Kraemer sees mission and openness as reciprocal causes when he writes in his article that "in the final analysis, in order to be a missionary power, the Church has to become a living and true community, open to everybody"<sup>88</sup>.

When, however, our writer turns his attention to the Christian Church in Indonesia he finds reasons for hope. He remarks that in that country the Church in many cases grew out of the Muslim people with whom it lived. He goes on to praise the Indonesian Christian communities because they are, he writes, "even in the present difficult circumstances, resolutely missionary - a situation that is unique in the

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<sup>88</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 150.

whole history of missions to Islam"<sup>89</sup>.

Now to conclude our analysis of those two articles on the Church in Muslim Asia. One is struck by a few basic thoughts that underlie all of Dr Kraemer's considerations: the importance of ecumenism as a first step in the Church's approach to Islam, the conviction that the work of mission now more than ever devolves upon the local Churches, the principle that the missionary must now move and work from within the local Christian communities. These no doubt are not altogether novel ideas; but one has to allow for a definite shift in emphasis in these last writings: from the individual missionary to the indigenous community, from the local Church to the Church Universal. And one may find other indications that there is more to come. Let one ponder

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<sup>89</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 150. The Church is no doubt helped in Indonesia by the very conditions of Islam in some parts of that country, where historically and socially it enjoys less hold on its adherents. Dr Kraemer would be the first to admit this. On the other hand, if a missionary attitude is so outstanding a mark of the Churches in Indonesia, one may well wonder how much of it is owing to the teaching and foresight of our Dr Kraemer when he was in Java, and to his continuing influence afterwards. I am convinced that his role in the development of a missionary awareness in Indonesian Christianity, although by no means easy to evaluate, rates all the importance it can be given. See for instance his important observations on the (East Indian) "indigenous Churches which must learn to confess and to live in their own way" (inheemsche Kerken, die op eigen wijze moeten leeren belijden en leven) in Van godsdiensten en menschen, Reisindrukken van een Tambaram-ganger, Nijkerk, Callenbach, 1940, p. 197-202.

for instance the drift of this passage from "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Asia", with which we now bring this part of the present study to an end. Dr Kraemer writes:

The Church 'at home', in the western lands, will have to rethink its whole attitude towards the world of Islam: not only in the sense that we must rethink our missionary strategy, but in the sense that seemingly diminishing possibilities challenge us not to less, but to greater concern with the riddle which the emergence and continuing existence of Islam represent in the context of the history of the Christian Church. The least that can be said is that, in addition to rethinking and remodelling our work, genuine and special intercession for the Muslim world, and for the Christians and churches living in that world, is a first essential.<sup>90</sup>

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If the approach described in the above pages may be termed traditional, it is above all because it still aims at bringing about the conversion of Islam by the proclamation of the Gospel. One will readily recognize in this description the main trends of Dr Kraemer's general theory of mission. The ultimate goal is still the building of Christian communities amongst Muslims. Indeed, in Indonesia this objective was reached with some success. This however was not by any means the general rule. There nevertheless remains the pressing duty to witness to Jesus Christ; and

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<sup>90</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 148.

this duty calls in the first place for an ecumenical spirit of mutual respect which overlooks differences in order to present Islam with a faithful image of the Christian Church. Besides, this witness to Jesus Christ is incumbent upon the missionaries and the Christian communities and Churches whether it stirs interest or no, whether it leads to conversion or no. This point too is in keeping with Dr Kraemer's insistence that the missionary mandate of the Church should be carried out irrespective of success or failure. The importance of service in the mission to Islam is also emphasized and this again agrees with Dr Kraemer's idea of what a Church ought to do for the world, even though our author is careful to point out that in the circumstances prevailing in the Muslim world the missionary may find his offer of service misunderstood for a ploy to ensure continued Western dominance.

As regards the missionary himself the attitudes that Dr Kraemer demands of him are the same that he expects of any missionary sent to the non-Christian world. What stands out, however, is the warnings that he deems it necessary to direct to him. Given all that the Christian faith and Islam have in common, the missionary is told to keep on his guard against the perils of futile controversies and false points of contact. So many theological similarities could be advocated for a rapprochement between Islam and Christianity

that Dr Kraemer sets his face like flint against them all. Rather these will hinder the missionary in his efforts to draw for the Muslims a true picture of the features of Christianity, which are those of Jesus Christ himself. He, the missionary, must become the true point of contact with Islam through his willingness to learn, his interest for Muslims and their culture, his readiness to serve them. And while straining every fibre of his heart in order to carry out that programme, he should keep the dialogue centred on what really matters in religion: the relationship between God and man.

All this may seem repetitious and perhaps is. Yet in the two articles studied in the second section of this essay there emerge some important elements which, while keeping the continuity of Dr Kraemer's thought unbroken, provide us with clues to further developments in his understanding of the mission to Islam but for the time being raise a number of questions.

There is first of all a clear allusion to the dwindling importance of the missionary. This logically follows from Dr Kraemer's own insistence on the obligations of the Christian Church inside the world of Islam. Whether they are the old Eastern Churches or the new Christian communities, they all must offer a witness of unity, they must open up to the society around them, they must fight off the temptation of

pastoral narcissism, and they must stand by their missionary duty towards their non-Christian environment. What of the missionary then? Of course he still appears as a helper, a collaborator, or even an animator urging on the indigenous Churches in their missionary élan. But does Dr Kraemer think he has outlived his usefulness? Or that his role too should be redefined?

Secondly, one comes across a down-to-earth and not too cheerful assessment of future missionary possibilities in certain parts of the Muslim world, especially in the countries of the Near and Middle East. Dr Kraemer speaks of "increasingly severe restrictions"<sup>91</sup>. It may be expected that sooner or later missionaries will not be tolerated any more since those countries are without fail marching towards independence and will no doubt decide like Pakistan to shape their national lives according to Muslim principles. "The diminishing possibilities"<sup>92</sup> for the mission challenge the universal Church. But when it comes to the harsh realities of daily life it is the local Church in the several Muslim countries that must pick up the gauntlet. In the event that the Gospel may be proclaimed no more, whether from the roof tops or in the secrecy of the sanctum, under what shape or

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<sup>91</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 147.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

form will Christianity deliver its message?

A third point concerns an important distinction made by Dr Kraemer. There are two kinds of countries where Islam dominates: those that have lived with Islam ever since the beginning of its existence, such as North Africa, the Near and Middle East; and those that knew it later in history, for instance the countries south of the Sahara, Indonesia and Pakistan. Dr Kraemer observes that for the time being religious tolerance exists in Pakistan and in Indonesia and that in those two largely Muslim populations the door is still open to the Gospel. In actual fact the increasingly severe restrictions mentioned above apply especially to the territories of the Near and Middle East, that is to say the native lands of Islam. Would Dr Kraemer see in that distinction between two categories of Muslim countries any significance for the mission to Islam?

And finally there is Dr Kraemer's intriguing entreaty to rethink the missionary strategy and to remodel its work<sup>93</sup>. This appeal is directed to the home base of the missionary enterprise. A prevailing attitude of the Church at home in respect of Islam is hereby called in question. But what change does our author suggest? This change of attitude goes together with a new course of action and a new pattern

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 148.

of work. There again Dr Kraemer does not take us further into his confidence and to conjecture any more would be pure guesswork.

These are four questions or sets of questions that could only find a solution in other writings of Dr Kraemer's. Since it is our good fortune to have such writings, we may look up the answer if we so desire.

## CHAPTER VII

### SECOND THOUGHTS ON THE MISSION TO ISLAM

The missionary approach to Islam proposed by Dr Kraemer in such of his early writings as are to be found in From Missionfield to Independent Church<sup>1</sup>, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World<sup>2</sup> and De Islam als godsdiensstig- en als zendingsprobleem<sup>3</sup> corresponds to the situation of the Christian missions during the colonial period and may well be called Dr Kraemer's traditional view of the mission to Islam. This view, however, does not coincide on all points with what he later wrote on the subject. In the late fifties the former missionary to Indonesia thought anew the question of the mission to Islam. He was prompted in his reflexion by the changes that were taking place in the Muslim world. The former colonies of the Western powers were well on their way to independence and would soon have their seats and says as members of the

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1 Hendrik Kraemer, From Missionfield to Independent Church, London, SCM Press, 1958, 186 p. This book contains reports written by Dr Kraemer from 1926 to 1933 during his stay in the Dutch East Indies. Future references to this book will quote only From Missionfield.

2 Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p. Referred to later on as The Christian Message.

3 Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam als godsdiensstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum, 1938, 48 p. Quoted in future references as De Islam als probleem.

United Nations Organization. Still more important, some of those nations, most of which belonged to the Arab world, were possessed of large oil reserves. This gave them a powerful handle in their dealings with the former masters of the economic world: Europe, North America and Japan. It thus happened that for the first time since the late Middle Ages the Arab nations wielded enough economic power to make themselves heard and heeded by the Western world, and even accepted, however grudgingly, as full partners in the political decisions taken on the international plane.

This turn of events was confirming beyond all doubts a far-sighted prognosis Dr Kraemer had made in The Christian Message some twenty years earlier when he wrote: "We have entered on a very important new phase in modern history, which we call by the name of the meeting of East and West"<sup>4</sup>. Our author had spoken of a meeting: not the kind of forced encounter that the West had inflicted upon those peoples that had "long remained largely victims and not actors"<sup>5</sup>. Actually the former victims were by way of turning into real actors. "The East", Dr Kraemer wrote, "rides again the horses

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<sup>4</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 20. On the East-West encounter as a secondary motive for the mission in Dr Kraemer's thought, cf. E. Jansen Schoonhoven's article "Critische bespreking van enige zendingsmotieven", in Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift, Vol. 5 (1950-51), No. 4, April 1951, p. 219-230.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

of its own destiny"<sup>6</sup>. And he comments further, still in The Christian Message:

The East, which not very long ago played only a passive or negligible rôle in the determination of the course of world history, has become now a factor as influential as the West.<sup>7</sup>

In 1978 such words are hardly striking and tell us nothing new. Written before World War II, when in actual fact Japan was the only Eastern nation with any significant influence in the affairs of the world, those words must have sounded like the fanciful utterance of a dreamer.

What concerned Dr Kraemer, however, was not just the interplay of economic and political forces. With all "those who are engaged in the great missionary cause"<sup>8</sup>, as he writes, he thought of the impact of things to come upon the great religions of the world. Somewhat prophetically he again pointed out that

Islam, Buddhism, the great Eastern idealistic systems are no longer confined to definite sections and regions of the world. Their latent dynamics, whether spiritual or political, may become world-factors.<sup>9</sup>

Those words were written about 1937. Twenty years later it was perfectly clear that Islam was indeed becoming a world-factor

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6 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 20.

7 Ibid., p. 21.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

both as a religious and as a political power. Of all Muslim lands, of all those in particular whose history had been so closely linked with that of mediaeval Europe, only Algeria still remained outside the pale of independent nations.

For Dr Kraemer these were not mere political events. They meant a fateful turn of the times and a signal beckoning to Christianity and Islam that they could now look forward to what had never really happened before: a true encounter between equal partners which might eventually lead to a fruitful dialogue between two great religions. The new state of affairs in the world offered the Christian Church the chance to start all over again as it were and put to rights what it had bungled in its first encounters with the House of Islam. But Dr/Kraemer thought this would also call for a reassessment of the missionary venture, for a 're-modelling of its work and for a rethinking of its strategy. This study intends to look into these momentous issues.

For this purpose it seems necessary to answer three questions: what new opportunities for the mission to Islam did Dr Kraemer read into the changing situation of the Muslim world? Secondly, what were the main factors that led him to reconsider the ways and means of the mission to Islam? And finally, what new picture of that mission does he draw in his later writings on Islam?

1. New Opportunities for the  
Church's Mission to Islam.

One must go back to the year 1953; Dr Kraemer, aged sixty-five, was still the director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. In that year there appeared under his name in The International Review of Missions an article entitled "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia"<sup>10</sup>. On reading it, one does not escape the feeling that the former missionary of the East Indies is quite despondent about the future of the mission in the Muslim world and does not hold out much hope for the messengers of the Gospel. Twice at least in his article his tone is quite sombre, as when he speaks of "increasingly severe restrictions"<sup>11</sup> or again of "seemingly diminishing possibilities"<sup>12</sup>. It must be remembered that Dr Kraemer was then speaking of foreign missionaries working within the traditional framework of the mission to Islam.

What the Director of Bossey was witnessing in the early fifties had been gathering momentum ever since the independence of India and Pakistan in the year 1947, a date

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<sup>10</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 42, No. 2, April 1953, p. 144-150.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

that he came to refer to as "the watershed of 1947"<sup>13</sup> to show that it marked the dividing line between two postures of the world and two eras in history. The dramatic changes thus set in motion would be re-enacted in other parts of the colonial world, and there would yet be more countries with "increasingly severe restrictions" and "seemingly diminishing possibilities" for the missionaries.

For missionaries perhaps; but Dr Kraemer's analysis of the mutations in the condition of the world did not just stop there. In a book which appeared in 1960 under the title of World Cultures and World Religions<sup>14</sup> he takes a long look at the way Christianity - missions included - stands in its relation to the non-Christian world. Without glossing over the problems and inadequacies, he stresses the positive aspects that have come out in the changed picture of the world.

World Cultures and World Religions is based on the lectures Dr Kraemer delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1958. It may be remembered that Dr Kraemer had retired from the Ecumenical Institute in the summer of 1955. It is tempting and up to a point right to see in that book,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, "Mission im Wandel der Völkerwelt", p. 293, in Der Auftrag der Kirche in der modernen Welt, Festgabe zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag von Emil Brunner, Ed. by P. Jogelsanger, Zürich, Zwingli Verlag, 1959, p. 291-307.

<sup>14</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions. The Coming Dialogue, London, Lutterworth Press, 1960, 386 p. Henceforth referred to as World Cultures.

which came out in 1960, a sequel to the historical reflexion that underlay The Christian Message and is to be found expressed at its best in its first chapter dealing with "A World in Transition"<sup>15</sup>. World Cultures is not primarily concerned with missionary problems or policies. Our author states in his preface that he has treated "the subject in a strictly historical fashion"<sup>16</sup>. What nevertheless makes the book interesting for us, apart from its long developments on Islam<sup>17</sup>, is precisely that Dr Kraemer's point of view is not merely historical. Behind the scientific looks of our man there always lurks a very convinced Christian. He himself confesses a few pages later that "This book is written from a definitely Christian standpoint and therefore ultimately will make an endeavour to offer a Christian interpretation"<sup>18</sup>.

When Dr Kraemer adds to the title of his book these other words The Coming Dialogue, we already know who are going to be the partners in that exchange. With our former missionary the dialogue is never seen as simply a cultural encounter between a very general and neutral West and the rest of the world. From his point of view the one partner

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15 Cf. Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 1-30.

16 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 9.

17 Cf. Ibid., p. 29-55, 99-125 and passim.

18 Ibid., p. 19.

is going to be Christianity, or the Christian faith, or the Christian Church over against the other cultures and religions of the world. Nor on the other hand can one narrow down the argument of World Cultures to a meeting of the West and the Muslim world. It is true that in his book Dr Kraemer spends more time on Islam than on the other religious or cultural growths of the East. This is only natural since the contact of Europe with Islam lasted longer, moved closer and went deeper than was the case with any other cultural or religious systems from the East. All the same, Dr Kraemer's study embraces the great Eastern religions and only in this larger context does he detect new opportunities for the Christian faith in respect of all the great non-Christian cultures, including of course Islam.

Unlike other thinkers who feel that the end of European political domination also means the end of Western cultural and spiritual influence, Dr Kraemer assures us in his book that

we are standing only at the beginning of a cultural confrontation and meeting of unprecedented and incalculable dimensions, in which the conscious running and willing of man, be he Western or Eastern, is not necessarily the decisive factor.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 78. Dr Kraemer's italics.

Undoubtedly the first factor in that cultural confrontation had been what our author calls the Western invasion. And the moves and marches of that invasion were "aimed primarily at political dominance and economic control"<sup>20</sup>. But its effects had been felt at a far deeper level. In the contemporary period, which had seen the writing on the wall for the colonial powers, something had occurred the consequences of which could never be recalled. Here is how Dr Kraemer describes that historic moment:

The shock and effect of the Western invasion in all its aspects (not only its cultural ones) has for the first time brought into being a hitherto unknown kind of spatial contact and intellectual awareness of one another, which these great regional civilizations had never experienced in this way before.<sup>21</sup>

These words outline for us the broader setting in which the question of Islam must be looked into. One might perhaps argue that Islam is a different case altogether since there had already taken place in the Middle Ages the kind of spatial and intellectual contact mentioned in the above quotation. But Dr Kraemer immediately puts us right. Islam too, or the Muslim world, went through the same experience as the rest of the Eastern world. The tremor that shook up the House of Islam as well he describes in his book as

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<sup>20</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 101. Dr Kraemer's italics.

nothing less than the penetration of a rationalist, individualistic, secularized civilization, provided with a great scientific, military and technical superiority, into a world which was living in a timeless, leisurely atmosphere, determined by age-old religions and social traditions.<sup>22</sup>

The intrusion and interference had been felt with particular poignancy by "the old core of the Muslim world (Near and Middle East, North Africa)"<sup>23</sup> whose memories of past history had led it completely to identify the Christian West with Christianity itself. That is one of the reasons, Dr Kraemer says, why "the relation Islam-Western world"<sup>(1)</sup> is one of the most thorny questions of the present time"<sup>24</sup>.

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22 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 102.

23 Ibid., p. 103.

24 Ibid., p. 264. The text refers to a footnote<sup>(1)</sup> which reads: "This is not in the first place meant in the political sense of the West and the Arab world. To succeed in arranging Round Tables of Muslims and Christians, where the discussion of no subject is banned and candidness can get free play, is still a rare occurrence. Hence the significance of such endeavours as 'Bahamdun', 'Toumliline' and the experiments in contact by 'Cimade'." On the Muslim-Christian encounter that took place at Bhamdoun, Lebanon, in 1954, cf. the interesting review article of J. Henninger, "The Proceedings of the First Muslim-Christian Convocation, Bhamdoun, Lebanon, April 22-27, 1954", in Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1959, p. 235-237. - The Benedictine monastery of Toumliline in Morocco was founded in 1952. It was closed in 1968 at the request of the Moroccan government. The monks went back to France and settled down at Villecerf where their monastery is still known as the 'Prieuré de Toumliline'. - CIMADE is a French Protestant organization whose members are active in ecumenical and international cooperation.

On the other hand it is not true that the impact is felt on the side of Islam only. One may speak, as Dr Kraemer does in his book, of an Arab invasion as well. Not that the Muslim faith is having a direct influence on the European culture; but Islam's increasing importance on the international scene and "its geographical and historical propinquity"<sup>25</sup> are elements that bear out Dr Kraemer's view. Here is how he explains this in World Cultures:

The Muslim world, especially the Arab Muslim world, invades the Western world by its sheer position (2) with a claim for an attitude of greater moral responsibility. This is an "invasion" of a different order, but an inescapable one, as inescapable as the ongoing meeting of East and West.<sup>26</sup>

It is in this "ongoing meeting of East and West" that one must see the occasion for a true encounter between Islam and Christianity. This encounter, brought about by the new circumstances in which both Islam and Christianity find themselves, is further favoured by the sense of equality that is bred in the two partners with the growing importance of the Muslim world and of the Arab countries in particular. But Dr Kraemer does not tell us how this new situation,

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25 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 271.

26 Ibid. Note 2 in the text reads: "Again, it does not matter whether the Muslim world makes this claim. Made or unmade, it arises out of the world-historical situation, and is there." All italics from Dr Kraemer.

which raises hopes for the coming dialogue, would in practice affect the Church's missionary obligation in respect of Islam. He is content to analyze the present state of Islam in various countries<sup>27</sup>, comments on the Lahore Colloquium<sup>28</sup> and notes a more irenic tone in contemporary Muslim apologetics<sup>29</sup>, but tells us precious little that would avail our present inquiry. It is obvious that the long passages Dr Kraemer devotes to Islam in World Cultures are mostly intended to buttress his main thesis on the nature of what is now going on between East and West. However that may be, the missionary interested in Islam will find little that concerns him in the book's last chapter entitled "The Terms of the Coming Dialogue". Indeed Dr Kraemer notifies him that "the observations are made almost exclusively with an eye on the Indian and the Far Eastern world of religious cultures, as Islam and Judaism are quite a different case"<sup>30</sup>. These last two, our author reminds us, are "historically speaking, a family affair (...)"<sup>31</sup>.

Fortunately there are other writings of Dr Kraemer's that deal with the question of new opportunities for the

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27 Cf. Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 99-125 and 281-299.

28 Cf. Ibid., p. 293-296.

29 Cf. Ibid., p. 296.

30 Ibid., p. 366.

31 Ibid., p. 367.

mission to Islam alone. Three articles or essays written about 1960, namely "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie", "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy" and "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam"<sup>32</sup> complement one another and offer a fair description of how things stand between Christianity and Islam at the present time.

There are indeed hopeful pointers and positive signs in the altered conditions of the world as far as those two great religions are concerned. New possibilities are springing up. Dr Kraemer underlines the paradox of this situation. He writes:

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<sup>32</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie; l'Islam, une culture; points de confrontation entre l'Islam et le Christianisme", in Revue de l'évangélisation, Vol. 16, No. 87, January-February 1960, p. 2-38, henceforth referred to as "L'Islam, une religion". Hendrik Kraemer, "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy", in The Muslim World, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 1960, p. 244-251, later quoted as "Islamic Culture". Hendrik Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten in der Begegnung von Christentum und Islam, historisch und theologisch" and "Die Lage der islamischen Welt und die christliche Kirche", in Neue Begegnung von Kirche und Islam, ed. by W. Holsten, Stuttgart, Evang. Missionsverlag, 1960, p. 15-27 and 28-36; these two essays, which form a whole, are referred to by the single title of "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" in the following pages.

Here is one of the most remarkable things I have gradually noticed over the last decades: although the Muslim world in the Arab territories is in a way resolutely slamming the door for the Christian mission as an organized and institutional enterprise and while the anti-West feeling is waxing stronger, yet there appear new possibilities for genuine communication and for getting out of hardened historical positions.<sup>33</sup>

One of the reasons for these new possibilities is of course the end of Islam's age-old isolation to which Dr Kraemer has already referred in World Cultures when he spoke of an "Arab invasion". In point of fact, the House of Islam feels more and more at home in the world of nations. It has also dawned upon it that civilization, "although the creation of the West, is a common property"<sup>34</sup>: hence the growing demand for technical development and technological knowledge thanks to which the Muslim nations hope to catch up with the Western world. This is one of the many ways in which new contacts are made. Our author notes that in their desire to meet the

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<sup>33</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 30: "Es ist eines der merkwürdigsten Dinge, die ich in den letzten Jahrzehnten allmählich wahrgenommen habe, dass, während die islamische Welt in den arabischen Ländern in gewissem Sinne resolut die Tür für die christliche Mission als eine organisierte, institutionelle Angelegenheit zuschlägt und die antiwestliche Stimmung noch immer im Wachsen ist, sich doch neue Möglichkeiten für wirkliche Kommunikation und das Heraustreten aus versteiften historischen Positionen auftun."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 33: "Diese Zivilisation betrachtet man, obwohl man weiss, dass sie Schöpfung des Westens ist, als gemeinsames Eigentum."

challenges of modernity the Muslims

are looking for a solution, and this creates opportunities for human contacts, for Christian service, for witness, that are truly unique and had never offered themselves until now.<sup>35</sup>

And he adds this startling comment:

This is not the work of the Christian missions, but of the buses, the factories, and the machines, of the dynamic unleashed upon all the earth by the modern world. Nowadays buses are the tools of evangelism in the non-Christian world.<sup>36</sup>

Another important factor has to be taken into account. As a religion Islam now finds itself in stormy waters. It is thoroughly shaken by the onslaught of secularism and other Western trends, in much the same way that Christianity is. As the treasured models become useless and the proven patterns break down, Islam wonders how it can possibly maintain its own identity. Dr Kraemer raises that point and sees in the self-questioning of Islam an opportunity for Christianity. He writes:

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35 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 36: "ils cherchent une issue, et cela crée des possibilités de contacts humains, de service chrétien, de témoignage, vraiment uniques, qui ne s'étaient jamais présentées jusqu'à aujourd'hui."

36 Ibid.: "Ce n'est pas l'oeuvre des Missions chrétiennes, mais des autobus, des usines et des machines, du dynamisme projeté sur toute la terre par le monde moderne. Les autobus sont aujourd'hui des instruments d'évangélisation du monde non chrétien."

There lie in this situation the possibilities for the encounter between Christians and Muslims, for we are close to the Muslims on this question as we have already been concerning ourselves with it and still are.<sup>37</sup>

Dr Kraemer touches upon this matter in the article on "L'Islam, une religion" when he states that "the Christian world faces the same situation"<sup>38</sup>. "We are in the same boat", he continues, "although the background is different, for it is in the Christian world that there was born this powerful and puzzling civilization, which upsets all truths and values"<sup>39</sup>.

The crisis of identity with which Islam is now struggling coincides in many an educated Muslim with a change of attitude towards the Christian faith. In World Cultures Dr Kraemer had already drawn our attention to a mellowing, in tone if not in thought, of Muslim writers when referring to Christian material<sup>40</sup>. In the articles just quoted he comes back to this point. He lays great stress on how Muslims

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37 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 32: "An dieser Stelle liegen die Möglichkeiten der Begegnung zwischen Christen und Moslems, denn in dieser Frage sind wir den Moslems nahe, weil wir selbst schon mit ihr befasst waren und befasst sind."

38 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 36: "Le monde chrétien connaît une situation analogue (...)."

39 Ibid.: "Nous sommes dans le même bateau, bien qu'avec un 'background' différent, car c'est dans le monde chrétien qu'est née cete (sic) puissante et troublante civilisation, qui ébranle toutes les vérités et toutes les valeurs."

40 Cf. Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 296.

that have received a Western education do not feel in sympathy with the old spirit of the Schoolmen. So much so, he insists, that

they have forgotten that the Koran says that the Bible holds a revelation which the Christians and the Jews have garbled for their own ends. (...) Many Muslims, even amongst the theologians, are ready to speak of the Bible as a proper revelation from God, as a book which contains a great many remarkable things.<sup>41</sup>

This new cast of mind makes room for unexpected possibilities, particularly in the field of theological and religious converse, although, as Dr Kraemer points out, "this still remains the business of only small groups of people"<sup>42</sup>.

Dr Kraemer attaches great importance to that change of heart in a growing number of well-read Muslims. He notes that today's prominent educated Muslim is at bottom a crypto-Mutazzilite, in other words an ethical rationalist. Except within older conservative circles the narrow mediaeval outlook

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<sup>41</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 31: "car les évolués musulmans ont reçu une éducation occidentale, n'aiment pas l'esprit scolastique, et ont oublié que le Coran dit que la Bible contient une révélation que les Chrétiens et les Juifs ont faussée pour servir leur but. (...) Beaucoup de musulmans, même théologiens, sont prêts à parler de la Bible comme d'une révélation légitime de Dieu, d'un livre qui contient beaucoup de choses remarquables."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 36: "c'est pourquoi il y a plus de possibilités qu'autrefois d'avoir avec eux des rencontres théologiques et religieuses, bien que ceci ne concerne que des cercles restreints."

does not prevail any more<sup>43</sup>. Dr Kraemer finds in this situation grounds for renewed hopes, as when he writes that:

This fact, in conjunction with the impact of modern civilization, creates new and more possibilities of relations between Islam and the Christian Church than many (polemico-) theological missionary encounters.<sup>44</sup>

An emphasis on new opportunities is a common trait of the three articles we are now studying. The short writing on "Islamic Culture and Missionary Adequacy" offers further examples of this. After outlining the conditions prevailing in the Muslim world and the way in which they affect the Islamic culture, Dr Kraemer concludes that these call for "momentous changes"<sup>45</sup>, one in particular being a "necessary reversal of attitudes and evaluations"<sup>46</sup>. And he points out that "This change regards world politics, and the creation of new human relationships as well as it does Christian Missions"<sup>47</sup>. The "momentous changes" not only relate to the world in general, but they interest the Christian missions

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 26-27: "Diese Tatsache in Verbindung mit dem Eindringen der modernen Zivilisation schafft neue und mehr Möglichkeiten von Beziehungen zwischen Islam und christlicher Kirche als viele (kontrovers-) theologische missionarische Begegnungen."

<sup>45</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 247.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

as well. And the Western world, together with the Church and the Christian mission, must now awake to a new reality, that is to say, as Dr Kraemer explains:

since Islam began its world career there has never been in the relation of the Western world to the Muslim world a situation so full of unforeseen possibilities for the good as now.<sup>48</sup>

No doubt one has every right to make out in those "unforeseen possibilities" rising signs of hope for the mission to Islam. There are indeed new possibilities for contact between Islam and Christianity and one must praise God for such opportunities<sup>49</sup> since they mean, as our author explains, that "The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a little less hindered than in former days from penetrating into the world of Islam, provided we act with wisdom, knowledge and self-criticism"<sup>50</sup>.

A few years before, in 1953, when speaking about the missions in Muslim Asia, Dr Kraemer's tone had been definitely pessimistic. He had referred to "diminishing possibilities" and "increasingly severe restrictions"<sup>51</sup>. Hardly seven years

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<sup>48</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 247.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.: "L'Évangile de Jésus-Christ est un peu moins entravé qu'autrefois pour pénétrer dans le monde de l'Islam, pourvu que nous agissions avec sagesse, connaissance et autocritique."

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 147 and 148.

later he states that new possibilities are taking shape and that "the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a little less hindered". Has Dr Kraemer changed his mind about the future of the mission to Islam? He has indeed. But not in the way one might be tempted to gather from his hopeful words. Therefore one comes in for a shock when Dr Kraemer further explains what he means:

This means according to me that the time for the traditional sort of missions is now finished, at any rate in the Near East and in North Africa. I would even say that those missions always had the wrong ideas about the particular relationship between Islam and Christianity, and a method that was wrong.<sup>52</sup>

It is no use trying to gloss over the bluntness of that statement. It is plain and straightforward. In view of our author's otherwise well-known missionary convictions, this is, to put it mildly, a puzzling pronouncement. If this means a radical departure from his former views on the mission to Islam - and so it would seem - what then brought it about?

## 2. Towards a Rethinking of the Mission to Islam.

Before we busy ourselves with finding out what Dr Kraemer means exactly when he says that the mission to

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<sup>52</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 37: "Ceci veut dire à mon sens que le temps des Missions traditionnelles est fini, en tout cas en Proche Orient et en Afrique du Nord. Je dirais même que ces Missions ont toujours eu une fausse conception de la relation particulière Islam-Christianisme, et une méthode fausse."

Islam as we have known it is now finished, we will consider a few factors that throw some light on his final views on that mission. First of all, already in the early fifties Dr Kraemer showed himself preoccupied with the problems of communication, in particular communication between Christianity and Islam. Secondly, the quick end of the colonial era forced him to take another look at the mission to Islam. And, finally, he brought his reflexion on the vocation of the Church in the contemporary world to bear on the Christian missions in general.

A. The Problem of Communication.

In The Christian Message Dr Kraemer stressed the need for finding "terms and modes of expression"<sup>53</sup> that would make the challenge and invitation of the Gospel intelligible to non-Christians. But what retained his attention then was mostly how to communicate, in other words, how to translate the message. He does not seem to have been struck at the time by the fact that the communication of some piece of information or other calls in the first place for agreed channels of communication between people.

A few years later, Dr Kraemer's directorship of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey set him face to face with

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<sup>53</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 303.

problems of communication in his daily dealings with members of various Christian bodies intent on fostering understanding and indeed communication between their respective Churches. It is easy to conjure up the divers confessions and theologies represented at Bossey and the ticklish problems that arose from their differences. In his biography of our missionary Dr Van Leeuwen refers in particular to the problems of liturgy and language<sup>54</sup> and remarks that Dr Kraemer "saw himself nearly forced to forbid his compatriots the use of their own language"<sup>55</sup>.

Lectures on communication were also part of the curriculum at Bossey. In his own book on The Communication of the Christian Faith Dr Kraemer mentions the French sociologist Roger Mehl a number of times and quotes from his booklet La rencontre d'autrui<sup>56</sup>. Obviously Dr Kraemer was also influenced by Mehl's teaching at Bossey as may be inferred from the following passage. He writes:

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. A. Th. van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer dienaar der Wereldkerk, Amsterdam, W. ten Have, 1959, p. 163 and p. 168-170. Van Leeuwen's book is referred to as Hendrik Kraemer.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 168: "Kraemer ziet zich bijna gedwongen zijn landgenoten te verbieden hun eigen taal te spreken!"

<sup>56</sup> R. Mehl, La rencontre d'autrui. Remarques sur le problème de la communication, Cahiers théologiques, 36, Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1955, 61 p.

His booklet, which grew out of a course on communication that he gave during the third semester of the Graduate School for Ecumenical Studies at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, bears the significant title La Rencontre de l'autrui (sic).<sup>57</sup>

The third semester to which Dr Kraemer refers took place from October 1954 to February 1955<sup>58</sup> whilst he was still in office at Bossey.

To come back to the mission to Islam. There had been many attempts on the part of the Church to communicate the Gospel to the Muslims. These efforts had fallen short of their objective because of one hard fact: there was no communication between the House of Islam and the Christian Church. The upshot of this situation was that never had a true encounter occurred between the two religious communities. In The Communication of the Christian Faith, Dr Kraemer links together the lack of communication, the absence of dialogue and the futility of theological encounters in a passage which shows why, as he now sees, the relations between Islam and

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<sup>57</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 58. Dr Kraemer had already touched upon the same theme in Religion and the Christian Faith, London, Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 322, 364 and passim.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer, p. 170. The semesters of the Graduate School were started in 1952 and lasted from October to February.

Christianity "have been so distressingly sterile"<sup>59</sup>. He writes:

Islam is by its nature the ideology of a cultural, social, and political system, and met as its opponent a Christendom, which also behaved, against the nature of the Christian faith, as the ideology of a cultural, social, and religious system. Meeting each other in any real sense was, therefore, impossible. In the many apologetical and polemical skirmishes from both sides, moreover, communication in any sense was nonexistent because the tone was determined by this objective situation and by a doctrinal bias, which had become second nature. The debate could never become a discourse. It remained a sterile mock fight of two monologues.<sup>60</sup>

In such circumstances the first target of all the efforts of the Church should be the kind of communication that would result in a genuine dialogue with Islam. To achieve this, old attitudes had to be changed and the traditional ways of the mission had to be thought anew. As Dr Kraemer sees it, this goes as far as admitting that "the time for traditional missions is now finished"<sup>61</sup>.

This preoccupation with the problem of communication was to remain with Dr Kraemer to the end of his life. Those

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59 Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, p. 46.

60 Ibid. Dr Kraemer's italics.

61 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 37. "(...) le temps des Missions traditionnelles est fini (...)".

pages of Islam in a Christian Perspective<sup>62</sup> that he left us still bear the imprint of that concern of his. In his preface he speaks of "a new style, which is the still hidden treasure in the newly-awakened search for true 'communication'" and of "a search for new interpretation of the mind of Christ in the field of communication"<sup>63</sup>. It had been his intention to devote Part IV of his work to the subject of communication under the title of "The Call for and Possibilities of Communication". Its three chapters were to have dealt with the following themes: "The urgency, aim and meaning of dialogue between Islam and Christianity"; "The long frustration of communication and its humiliating history" and "Why do we live on the razor's edge of unprecedented possibility of communication?". Unfortunately, when Dr Kraemer died in 1965 those chapters were still unwritten.

#### B. The End of the Colonial Era.

Dr Kraemer was never blind to the lack of communication that for centuries marked the relations between Islam and Christianity. This, however, was not the most decisive element

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<sup>62</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, an unfinished typescript numbering 271 p. to which must be added 40 sheets of notes and references. By the time of his death in 1965 Dr Kraemer had completed only Parts I and II of the four that the book was meant to comprise.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

in his reflexion on the mission to Islam. The passing of the colonial era in the Muslim world set in glaring light the false position of the Christian missions.

When Dr Kraemer wrote The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, on the eve of World War II, the Arab or Muslim nations that enjoyed autonomy were not very many. One may mention Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran<sup>64</sup>. Of the so-called homelands of Islam in North Africa, only Egypt was a free nation.

The war and its aftermath would soon change that. From 1946 onwards the Muslim territories achieved full statehood in rapid succession. In 1946 Syria, Jordan and Lebanon got rid of the foreign mandates; Pakistan was born to nationhood in 1947; and so was Indonesia three years later. Libya reached independence in 1951. The French protectorate over Morocco ended in 1955 and the following year Tunisia was granted self-government. When Dr Kraemer wrote his three articles on Islam about 1959-1960, "L'Islam, une religion", "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten" and "Islamic Culture", the Arab and Muslim world as a whole had emerged out of the colonial period. Only Algeria was still fighting a cruel and relentless war which would come to a successful end two years later.

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<sup>64</sup> Egypt since 1922; Iraq, 1925; Saudi Arabia, 1932 and Iran since 1934.

It was forcibly borne in upon Dr Kraemer that a presence of the missions in Islam had only been made possible by the special circumstances of the colonial situation. Not that the colonial powers had contributed to the spread of Christianity in the midst of the Muslim populations. At any rate such had never been the policy of either the French or the Dutch authorities. Nevertheless the missionaries' lives had been protected and to a certain extent their freedom of movement and speech had been ensured. It must be confessed that in more ways than one the local Muslim populations had been forced to put up with the zeal of those heralds of a hated creed.

In the articles just mentioned Dr Kraemer is quite frank in his appraisal of evangelism in the Arab nations under colonial rule. He candidly admits that the presence of missions had something strained, not to say dishonest, about it. Speaking of the Christian mission in the Arabic-speaking nations he thinks that it has now done its time, and he concludes:

But when one looks at it rightly, it was always without a future. This reality could only be veiled through the presence of colonialism. This gave the Christian Church the possibility of an artificial existence, so to speak, in the world of Islam. The Christian mission became possible thanks to the democratic principles which the religiously neutral colonial powers imposed upon the Muslim territories.<sup>65</sup>

This presence of the Christian mission he does not shrink from qualifying as unnatural. After paying due tribute to the "many devoted and able men and women, who have patiently and often heroically toiled for the sake of Jesus Christ"<sup>66</sup>, our author unfolds the full implications of the colonial situation. He writes:

These indispensable considerations, however, do not annihilate the fact that Christian missions in the Muslim world during the colonial era had a distinct aspect of unnaturalness. This was so, not only because of the protection of the colonial governments, which made missions possible as a continued effort, but above all because the effort was made with entire disregard of the opinion of the Muslim population.<sup>67</sup>

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65 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 29: "Aber recht betrachtet war sie immer aussichtslos. Diese Tatsache konnte lediglich durch das Bestehen des Kolonialismus verdeckt werden. Er hat der christlichen Kirche die Möglichkeit einer sozusagen künstlichen Existenz in der Welt des Islam gegeben. Die christliche Mission wurde dank der demokratischen Prinzipien möglich, die die religiös neutralen Kolonialmächte den islamischen Gebieten aufzwingen".

66 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 249.

67 Ibid.

Now the times have changed: the colonial episode has had its day and the Muslim world has achieved its self-determination. These two facts, Dr Kraemer insists, "are therefore of the greatest moment to all missionary leaders and servants of missions in the Muslim world"<sup>68</sup>.

Dr Kraemer, as a servant of the mission, did take these facts very much to heart and accepted to change certain of his views on the mission to Islam. But other momentous events also influenced his missionary thinking: the emergence of local Churches and the progress of ecumenism; to such a degree that there arose before his mind's eyes the perspective of a new Christian vocation.

### C. The New Ways of the Christian Mission.

The changing course of history compelled Dr Kraemer to try and "discern the signs of the time"<sup>69</sup>. We should take a very narrow view of Dr Kraemer's understanding of the Church were we to think that his reading of the signs was restricted only to such as concerned the mission to Islam. Dr Kraemer knew right well that the mission to Islam was but one area of the mission of the Church to the world; and if his views on the mission to Islam were affected by contemporary

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<sup>68</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 249-250.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

events, it may be presumed that his comprehension of the mandate of the Church in general was in equal measure influenced by them. It would never have occurred to Dr Kraemer to divorce the mission to Islam from the broader obligations of the Church towards the world as a whole.

Although this study is expressly concerned with the mission to Islam, it would be unjust to insinuate, or even allow the very thought to arise, that this one sector of the Church's missionary field was Dr Kraemer's paramount pre-occupation. The man who had fought for the revival of his Church in Holland during the war years and who had later presided over the destinies of the Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland had a vision of the mission which coincided with the universal obligations of the Church. A survey of his writings from 1955 onwards bears eloquent testimony to this, as we shall now see.

When Dr Kraemer studies the problem of communication in his book on The Communication of the Christian Faith, what immediately arrests his attention is the breakdown in communication between the Church and the world and the implications of that crisis for the mission of the Church to the world<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, Chapter IV: "The Breakdown of Communication", p. 80-104; Chapter V: "Restoring Communication", p. 105-128.

After explaining why the Church and the world have drifted apart, our author shows how the estrangement of the Church affects its mission to the world under its threefold aspect of evangelization, service and fellowship. If communication is to be restored, he writes, a work of translation must be initiated, which means adapting the language of the Gospel so that "they should be enabled to hear the message"<sup>71</sup>. But this goes beyond the mere exchange of words and Dr Kraemer reminds his readers that "in many cases verbal silence combined with acts of disinterested, devoted identification and service may be the appropriate form of communication"<sup>72</sup>.

Furthermore, when Dr Kraemer speaks of service as an "appropriate form of communication", the reference to service is more than a casual remark. His book on A Theology of the Laity<sup>73</sup>, published in 1958, is written evidence of how important the notion of service has become in his reflexion on the Christian mission. He is not content to explain that the Church is mission, he must also add that the Church is ministry. To dispel the ambiguity that attaches to this last

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<sup>71</sup> Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith, p. 121. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, London, Lutterworth Press, 1958, 192 p.

word, often used in the sense of ecclesiastical office, he resorts to the term diakonia and writes: "It is therefore better to say: the Church is diakonia"<sup>74</sup>. This diakonia or service Dr Kraemer describes as "the fundamental law of the Church's existence and expression, and of Christian existence altogether"<sup>75</sup>. It will be useful to remember this new emphasis on the service of the Church when we come across it in later writings on the Christian mission.

If one now passes to Dr Kraemer's work on World Cultures and World Religions, a composition based on lectures delivered in 1958, one soon perceives that the book as a whole is inspired by the theme that appears in its subtitle "The Coming Dialogue" and that surfaces again in the last chapter on "The Terms of the Coming Dialogue". It is a dialogue which should take place between East and West no doubt. But when one knows Dr Kraemer, it is a foregone conclusion that this dialogue will also involve the Christian Church and the non-Christian religions. Once again it is patent that Dr Kraemer's reflexion tries to keep step with the march of events in the world, as may be seen from the questions he raises in the early pages of his book. When writing it, he says, he had something definite in mind and

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<sup>74</sup> Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, p. 143.  
Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 145-146.

that was, to use his own words:

to find some answers to specific Christian question such as: what is it that the Christian Church, with her peculiar message and calling, will have to face? How should she face this coming dialogue? And also, how should she express in that situation her inherent missionary nature, which under no condition can she ever surrender?<sup>76</sup>

Since the Church must not surrender its mandate and commitment in the coming dialogue with those religions that Dr Kraemer calls "the grand, elusive Eastern systems of humanist thinking"<sup>77</sup>, its prime obligation has not changed in the least. In our author's opinion the Church is still in duty bound

to vindicate the personal conception of the living God as manifest in Jesus Christ, and the meaning and purpose of Man and the World in the light of God's self-disclosure in the historical Jesus Christ.<sup>78</sup>

Dr Kraemer does not forget that a dialogue with the East could not be complete without the participation of Islam. But he observes that "Islamic religion and culture are a quite different proposition" since they have "with Christianity

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<sup>76</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, pp. 22-23. Dr Kraemer's italics. The first chapter of Dr Kraemer's book appears with slight changes as "The Encounter between East and West in the Civilization of our Time" in a collection of essays edited by E.J. Jurji: The Ecumenical Era in Church and Society. A Symposium in Honor of John A. Mackay, New York, Macmillan, 1959, p. 92-107.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 23. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

a contradictory relation of kinship and deep difference and animosity"<sup>79</sup>. For this reason and because the matter of communication with the Muslim world is, "historically speaking, a family affair"<sup>80</sup>, he does not touch upon Islam in his last chapter where he deals with "The Terms of the Coming Dialogue".

What Dr Kraemer writes about "a rethinking of the Christian faith and its meaning in contact and exchange with these Eastern religions"<sup>81</sup> is evidence enough of his continued reflexion on the missionary commitment of the Church in a world that has changed and is still changing. The most important aspect of that commitment - and the most relevant in these times - is that the Church should be true to its nature. What this entails Dr Kraemer explains in one of the last paragraphs of his book. He writes:

To be a true Church, that is to say a Christ-centred, Christ-inspired, Christ-obeying community in word and deed, in solidarity with the world serving everybody without discrimination, is the only answer and authentication to be given in the present and the future, both full of challenges.<sup>82</sup>

It is symptomatic of the book's general trend that the last words of World Cultures are directed to the Church

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79 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 24.

80 Ibid., p. 367.

81 Ibid., p. 375.

82 Ibid., p. 376. Dr Kraemer's italics.

and to the Christians. Towards the end of the fifties not only was Dr Kraemer rethinking the mission to Islam, he was in fact rethinking the mission as a whole. Against this background it would be misleading to separate Dr Kraemer's second thoughts on the mission to Islam from his reflexion on the mission of the Church at large.

There are further indications that the very factors that influenced Dr Kraemer's later ideas on the mission to Islam were also compelling him to take a new look at the missions in general. An essay published in 1959 in honour of Emil Brunner shows how deeply affected our author was by contemporary events in the world. In "Mission im Wandel der Völkerwelt"<sup>83</sup>, Dr Kraemer complains that the changes in the world, the end of the colonial period and the emergence of new free nations have taken the Church, not excluding the young Churches and the missionaries, by surprise<sup>84</sup>. What is worse, the Church and the missions, although fully aware of the changes, go on living as if the old framework had not collapsed, colonial situation, imperialistic domination and all. Or they merely try to adjust themselves to the new

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<sup>83</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "Mission im Wandel der Völkerwelt", in Der Auftrag der Kirche in der modernen Welt. Festgabe zum siebzigsten Geburtstag von Emil Brunner, Ed. by P. Vogelsanger, Zürich, Zwingli Verlag, 1959, p. 291-307. Henceforth referred to as "Mission im Wandel".

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

state of affairs as best they can when what is actually and urgently called for is a deep change of heart. He writes:

Certain adaptations have been carried out, without seeing that "adaptation" as such is not the need of the moment. What is required is much more a resolute conversion and only as a result of that conversion "adaptation" and a new strategy.<sup>85</sup>

If the changed conditions of the world clamour for a renewal of the Church, they are shouting even louder for the mission to be re-created. "We are not at the end of the mission"<sup>86</sup>, Dr Kraemer insists, but he goes on to affirm that "We have reached the definite end of a certain period or epoch of the mission and the more we see this with clarity and accept it from our hearts, the better"<sup>87</sup>. What is now beginning is an era of world mission in which the Church will be called upon to pioneer in leadership. This, Dr Kraemer adds, "will be far more demanding and less romantic than the heroic deeds of the past"<sup>88</sup>.

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85 Kraemer, "Mission im Wandel", p. 293: "Es werden gewisse Anpassungen vollzogen, ohne zu sehen, dass 'Anpassung' an sich nicht das Gebot der Stunde ist. Gefordert ist vielmehr eine resolute Umkehr und erst als Folge dieser Umkehr 'Anpassung' und eine neue Strategie."

86 Ibid., p. 295: "Wir sind nicht am Ende der Mission."

87 Ibid.: "Wir sind am definitiven Ende einer gewissen Missionsperiode oder 'Epoche', und je klarer wir das sehen und von Herzen bejahen, desto besser ist es."

88 Ibid.: "Eine Pionierleistung, die viel anspruchsvoller und weniger romantisch ist als die heroischen Taten der vergangenen Missionsepoche."

One distasteful fact is now staring the missionaries in the face and that is the basic oddity of the missionary system as a whole. The political independence of the former colonial territories is now forcing our eyes open to the point where one can speak of a crisis of the missions<sup>89</sup>.

Why? Because, Dr Kraemer explains,

All of a sudden it became crystal clear how much the mission had for a long time lived and worked under the protection of the colonial authority, which was rejected at heart by the very people amongst whom missionary work was taking place.<sup>90</sup>

Dr Kraemer is also quite concerned about the fate of the indigenous Churches. He fears lest they be ill prepared for their new responsibilities within the independent nations of Asia and Africa. They will have to work against the grain since they very often are the victims of "coarse discrimination and unfounded defamation"<sup>91</sup>. Moreover, those small Christian communities very often find themselves buffeted by the resurgence of the great non-Christian religions and are

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89 Cf. Kraemer, "Mission im Wandel", p. 301.

90 Ibid.: "Es wurde plötzlich kristallklar, wie sehr die Mission lange Zeit unter der Protektion der Kolonialherrschaft gelebt und gearbeitet hatte, der von den Völkern, unter denen die Missionsarbeit stattfand, innerlich abgelehnt wurde." Dr Kraemer's italics.

91 Ibid., p. 302: "(...) die oft krasse Diskriminierung und unbegründete Diffamierung der einheimischen Christen (...)".

looked upon as "the spiritual colonies of the West"<sup>92</sup>. On the other hand, the Christian sects and their reckless zeal, far from helping, constitute a real threat "because they bring mockery upon the unity of the Church, which in the non-Christian world is a matter of life and death"<sup>93</sup>.

The salient points of Dr Kraemer's argument bear on the conversion needed, on ecumenical support for the indigenous Churches, on the unwavering conviction that the mission belongs to the very heart of the Church and is the ground of its existence. This last point, Dr Kraemer insists,

should be said with force and conviction, day and night to the communities and to Christianity so that the will to mission remains alive, however threatening and insecure the world may be into which the message must go out.<sup>94</sup>

However, the mission for all its permanence must come to terms with a world that has changed. Dr Kraemer does not

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<sup>92</sup> Kraemer, "Mission im Wandel", p. 303: "Sie werden oft als 'geistliche Kolonisationen des Westens' behandelt (...)" In Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 410, Dr Kraemer had already complained that indigenous Churches "are in spite of all self-determination and independence and autonomy, still to a great extent, in their structure and style of expression, spiritual colonies of the West, copies of something, but not grown-up."

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 305: "Eine Gefahr, weil sie die Einheit der Kirche, die in der nicht-christlichen Welt eine Frage von Leben und Tod ist, zum Gespött machen (...)."

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 305-306: "Das soll man mit Kraft und Überzeugung, Tag und Nacht den Gemeinden und der Christenheit sagen, damit der Missionswille lebendig bleibt, wie bedrohlich und unsicher die Welt, in die die Botschaft ausgehen muss, sein mag."

hesitate to speak of a new Christian vocation in an article actually dealing with the mission to Islam and written at about the same time as the one from which we have just been quoting. In "L'Islam, une religion", our author refers to the growing importance of the Muslim world. Owing to their resources in petrol the Muslim countries have now become the new centre of the world. And this makes petrol, Dr Kraemer contends, "an eminently theological subject"<sup>95</sup>. He explains why:

If I say that it offers us a highly theological subject for meditation, this means that it teaches us a new lesson on how things stand with the world and, by the same token, on how from a practical point of view the Christian vocation is changing in this world.<sup>96</sup>

This remark does not apply exclusively to the mission to Islam. In point of fact Dr Kraemer has in mind not only Islam, but the other great non-Christian religions as well, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. The new ways of approach to those Eastern systems of thought and life he describes in terms of service. He writes in the same article:

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<sup>95</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 2-3: "Je leur dis (i.e. les théologiens) quelquefois: le pétrole est aujourd'hui un sujet éminemment théologique, et ce n'est pas une plaisanterie."

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.: "Si je dis qu'il nous offre un sujet de méditation éminemment théologique, cela signifie qu'il nous donne une nouvelle leçon sur la condition du monde, donc sur le changement pratique de la vocation chrétienne dans ce monde."

This may perhaps be the longer route in our approach to the great religions of the world, but it is the safest: one must take that way of service, of solidarity, of a share in mankind's concerns, in order to bring about true opportunities for preaching the Gospel, in order to clear a way in which the occasions for a genuine dialogue may arise naturally.<sup>97</sup>

Dr Kraemer comes back to the question of the great religions in what may have been his last article on the Christian mission, "The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission"<sup>98</sup>. He is impressed by the resurgence of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in their respective countries: the Muslim nations, India, Burma and Ceylon. This resurgence, which is not a religious revival<sup>99</sup>, is linked to political

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97 Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 4: "Ce chemin est peut-être fort long, pour aborder les grandes religions du monde, mais il est le plus sûr: il faut prendre ce chemin de service, de solidarité, de partage des intérêts humains pour créer une vraie occasion d'annoncer l'Évangile, pour ouvrir une voie dans laquelle peuvent se développer naturellement des occasions de vrais dialogues."

98 Hendrik Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission", in Philosophy, Religion, and the Coming World Civilization. Essays in Honor of William Ernest Hocking, Ed. by Leroy S. Rouner, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966, p. 235-249. Quoted henceforth as "The Role and Responsibility."

99 Cf. Ibid., p. 239. On the distinction Dr Kraemer draws between resurgence as a socio-cultural phenomenon and revival as a religious renewal, see World Cultures, p. 317-320, and "Wat is 'resurgence'?", in Uit de nalatenschap van Dr H. Kraemer, Een bundel opstellen bijeengebracht door Dr. B.J. Brouwer (et al.), Kampen, J.H. Kok N.V., 1970, p. 132-146.

and national aspirations<sup>100</sup>. The outcome of that renaissance, Dr Kraemer writes, is

reinterpretation and new self-expression, which stresses in a new and more vigorous way than ever before, the claim of universality, of equality with the other great cultures and religions of the world, or by preference, that of their superiority.<sup>101</sup>

The self-assertiveness of this movement reaches its climax in "a newly awakened sense of culture and religious mission"<sup>102</sup>, so that one may soon be forced to speak of "the Eastern Penetration and Invasion in the Occident"<sup>103</sup>. This puts Dr Kraemer in mind of his favourite theme: the East and West encounter. To quote his own words:

In the present world of religious pluralism and of growing secularism in East and West, we face the unprecedented spectacle of the real meeting and encounter of the great religions and cultures of the East and of the West.<sup>104</sup>

Further on Dr Kraemer stresses how the present conjuncture "makes the problem of interreligious relationships (an urgent one"<sup>105</sup>. Obviously it is the bounden duty of the

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100 Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility", p. 239.

101 Ibid., p. 239-240.

102 Ibid., p. 240.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., p. 243.

Christian mission to assume its responsibilities in this pressing matter since, as Dr Kraemer says,

it is the embodiment of the most essential expression of the nature and calling of the Christian Church, that is to say to proclaim by word and deed the universal Truth in Jesus Christ.<sup>106</sup>

Why does Dr Kraemer think it necessary at this stage to define what he means by Christian mission? To avoid confusion with the missions, or a too narrow understanding of the word? At any rate, here is how he explains it:

"Christian Mission" I understand in our context as the apostolic and serving activity that emanates from the Christian mission of the West and of the East as the manifestation of the peculiar spirit of Christianity.<sup>107</sup>

Dr Kraemer then goes on to look into the motives behind the widespread interest in interreligious relationships. There is a universal craving for peace coupled with the insight "that religion qua talis and therefore religions, ought to be guardians and promoters (sic) of peace and happiness"<sup>108</sup>. One may also allow for "an element of

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106 Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility", p. 243.

107 Ibid., p. 243-244. The text does read "that emanates from the Christian mission". But the "Christian mission" defined as "the activity that emanates from the Christian mission" has the ring of a truism. The reference to the East and the West in our quotation shows that Dr Kraemer may have meant "the activity that emanates from the Christian Church."

108 Ibid., p. 244.

self-assertiveness and extreme sensitivity"<sup>109</sup>. The last factor, however, has its definite drawbacks, and may render a religious encounter extremely difficult, especially where past history has left a legacy of rancour and suspicion. Dr Kraemer mentions the case of India and Pakistan<sup>110</sup>. Neither must religious interrelationships be approached in a spirit of simplification or relativism. Relativism is especially objectionable because it "is underrating the seriousness inherent in true religion"<sup>111</sup>. Hence the following principle posited by Dr Kraemer, which he calls a "fundamental presupposition". He writes:

(...) the adherents of different religions taking part in interreligious relationships, must accept the other religion(s) as they in essence and meaning are; and not seek for a common denominator of religious agreement, assumed to be the common core of all.<sup>112</sup>

We have so far described Dr Kraemer's views on the question of religious interrelationships. Does the Christian mission fit at all into this picture and, if it does, what is its special responsibility? It does, Dr Kraemer answers, and it must "join in this world-wide undertaking"<sup>113</sup>. And

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<sup>109</sup> Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility", p. 245.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

its duty can be summed up in the four words: witness, solidarity, respect and service. This fourfold obligation Dr Kraemer exposes in the following passage, for the length of which we offer no apologies since it is probably his last published statement on the mission. "In relation to the multiplicity of man's faith and worship", he writes, here is how the Christian mission must now be understood:

To be faithful to its nature, which is expressed in the name "Christian mission". To take great pains to make clear that this Mission, just because it is Christian is executed with a feeling of deep solidarity with the great human, moral, social and material problems of the peoples which belong to the non-Christian religions. To exert itself to show that the desire to make known the truth in Jesus Christ goes and should go together with fostering a sincere understanding and respect for the non-Christian religions (...). Finally, the Christian mission should always be open to every possibility of interreligious relationship and of cooperation in alleviating suffering and serving the needs and problems of the world.<sup>114</sup>

Dr Kraemer retains that the Christian mission must remain faithful to its nature, that is to say to its mandate which is fulfilled in the first place by the witness to Jesus Christ. Indeed, a little further Dr Kraemer does mention "the desire to make known the truth in Jesus Christ". And we are still speaking of mission since the Church must go out to the non-Christians, inspired in its zeal by motives of solidarity, respect and service.

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<sup>114</sup> Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility", p. 249.

The mission, as a charge laid upon the Church to witness, carries with it an urge to shout the truth of Jesus Christ and a movement towards the non-Christians. In the present posture of the world, however, when the great non-Christian religions proudly assert themselves as cultural heritages, treasured bonds of national unity and even political ideologies, what matters most is to pave the way for a true dialogue between religions. This way follows the signposts of mutual respect and brotherly cooperation. No doubt this is "a pragmatic basis with a pragmatic goal in mind"<sup>115</sup>, as our author is the first to grant, but it derives from a conviction that

this constant meeting on the human plane is the best way to go into open and sincere contact with each other on the fundamental realities behind each other's religions (...)<sup>116</sup>

Only in the light of Dr Kraemer's rethinking of the mission in general can one understand why he speaks of the end of the traditional missions to Islam and of a reorientation of the missionary endeavour. That mission too must be seen through the prism of resurgent religions, assertive nationalisms and political ideologies. This we intend to set forth in the next section which deals in detail with

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115 Kraemer, "The Role and Responsibility", p. 249.

116 Ibid.

Dr Kraemer's later views on the Christian mission to Islam<sup>117</sup>.

### 3. A Reorientation of the Mission to Islam.

In order to find an explicit mention of the need for a reorientation of the mission to Islam, one must refer to the three short writings already quoted in our early pages, namely "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", "L'Islam, une religion" and "Islamic Culture". We had concluded our survey of the new opportunities offered to the Church in the Muslim world with this unexpected statement of Dr Kraemer's: "This means according to me that the time for the traditional sort of missions is now finished, at any rate in the Near East and in North Africa"<sup>118</sup>. Before trying to find out in more detail what our author means by the traditional missions, let us first note that he qualifies his assertion by adding "at any rate in the Near East and in North Africa". We find in his other articles the same kind of restriction. In "Islamic Culture", for example, he points out that

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<sup>117</sup> For a very satisfying survey of post-Tamparam developments in Dr Kraemer's theology of mission in the context of contemporary trends in missionary thought cf. C.F. Hallencreutz, New Approaches to Men of Other Faiths 1938-1968. A Theological Discussion, Research Pamphlet No. 18, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1970, p. 47-55.

<sup>118</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 37.

in using the term "Muslim world" I have in fact in mind the Arabic-speaking Muslim world, which is the key-part of the total Muslim world, and that part where Islam had its origin and gradually developed into a religious-cultural-social system of life, and into a distinct polity.<sup>119</sup>

Dr Kraemer knows Islam too well to equate Muslim world with Arab nations. Many countries belonging to the Muslim world, he explains, were "in their history recipients, and not creators, of Islam"<sup>120</sup>. One familiar with Dr Kraemer's writings will be reminded of a stock distinction of his between the cradle or native lands of Islam and those others that Islam subdued when it had already reached its full growth<sup>121</sup>. We shall follow this distinction and hear Dr Kraemer on the mission to Arabic-speaking lands first. As regards what he calls "the vast Islamic expansions in Africa south of the Sahara, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, etc."<sup>122</sup>, we shall come back to them later.

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119 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 248.

120 Ibid.

121 Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, "Islam in India Today", in The Moslem World, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 1931, p. 152; Hendrik Kraemer, "Eenige grepen uit de moderne Apologie van den Islam", in Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde, Vol. 75, No. 2, 1935, p. 165-166 and 168; Hendrik Kraemer, De Islam als godsdienstig- en als zendingsprobleem, 's-Gravenhage, Boekencentrum N.V., 1938, p. 43. In this last writing India (i.e. that part of it which became Pakistan) is also listed among "the old hereditary lands (...) of Islam" (de oude erflanden ... van den Islam).

122 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 248.

## A. The Mission to Islam in the Arabic-Speaking World.

The important point at this stage is to grasp exactly what Dr Kraemer means. In "Islamic Culture" Dr Kraemer explains further:

The time of Christian missions in the Muslim world, as the organized determined effort for converting Muslims and as inherited from the nineteenth century, is, as far as I see, passed in the post-colonial era.<sup>123</sup>

In other words, in the Arabic-speaking world the Christian missions as we knew them have gone out of date. Does Dr Kraemer mean in truth that the Church ought to give up any idea of conversion for the Muslims? Sure enough, his way of putting it in "L'Islam, une religion" is even more to the point. Here is what our former missionary writes:

The Church and the Christians nowadays ought not to regard the Muslims as people to be set upon or to be won over in the usual sense of the word, which is the best way to get them to shrink into themselves.<sup>124</sup>

Earlier on Dr Kraemer had criticized the Christian missions on the ground that they had "always had the wrong ideas about the particular relationship between Islam and Christianity

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<sup>123</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 250. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>124</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 38: "L'Eglise et les chrétiens ne doivent plus regarder aujourd'hui les musulmans comme des gens à attaquer ou à convertir dans le sens habituel du mot, ce qui est le meilleur moyen de les faire se contracter."

and a method that was wrong"<sup>125</sup>.

Such statements raise serious questions. One would like to ask Dr Kraemer: "Does the missionary mandate of the Church still hold good in respect of the Muslim people of the Arab world? If it does, ought not one to give the Christian mission a new meaning? And how is this mission with a new meaning to be carried out?" We shall find that the answers to these questions may be gathered from the three articles or essays already mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section on a reorientation of the mission to Islam.

In Dr Kraemer's mind there stirs no doubt whatsoever that the Church is still bound by its missionary duty towards the world of Islam. On that score he expresses his view with axiomatic certainty. He states that

it is assumed, without arguing, that the Christian Church has the unalterable calling and obligation to transmit and offer the message of Jesus Christ's universal claim on the obedience and faith of all men, to whatever religion, non-religion or culture they may belong.<sup>126</sup>

Dr Kraemer's act of faith in the mission is quite in harmony with his flat expression in World Cultures of the Church's

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<sup>125</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 37: "Je dirais même que ces Missions ont toujours eu une fausse conception de la relation particulière Islam-Christianisme, et une méthode fausse."

<sup>126</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 248.

"inherent missionary nature, which under no condition can she ever surrender"<sup>127</sup>.

Granted that the Church cannot surrender its missionary duty, Dr Kraemer thinks nonetheless that the present conjuncture calls it to a practical reflexion on what that duty now entails with regard to the non-Christian religions and more especially in respect of the Arab Muslim world. In the motley picture of the world as it emerges after the colonial era, Dr Kraemer makes out one basic and immediate requirement for the mission to Islam. He writes:

A radical rethinking and reshaping is therefore imperiously demanded, if "we discern the signs of the time" and are willing to learn to walk in new ways of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>128</sup>

In his desire to obey "the signs of the time" Dr Kraemer is convinced that the mission to Islam, worked out and carried out as a dashing drive to conquer the souls of the Arab Muslims, has outlived its purpose - if it ever had one. When our author speaks of "radical rethinking and reshaping", one senses that he wants his words to carry as far as they possibly can. These words call for a radical departure from what is generally accepted in missionary circles, namely the conversion of the non-Christians. Dr Kraemer hammers the

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<sup>127</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 250. Dr Kraemer's italics.

idea into his readers' heads by adding that "the mind has to be disengaged from all former conceptions"<sup>129</sup>, but he dare not, or will not, take us any deeper into his confidence. He fears, as he explains, that

The necessary briefness of this treatment would unavoidably cause misunderstandings and (often, not always) wrong questioning, distracting the reader from the real issues at stake.<sup>130</sup>

One thing however he does tell us and this brings us to the immediate goal of the Church's efforts: to bridge the gap between Christianity and Islam in order, as it were, to bring the two within hearing distance of each other. The possibility is there, Dr Kraemer thinks. He is led to the conclusion, he says,

that the past, age-long relationship of antagonism, unilateral closedness of mind, and communication by monologue, has turned into the possibility and necessity of a new relationship of mutual interdependence (material and cultural) and of genuine human encounter and open dialogue.<sup>131</sup>

And he goes on to mention his forthcoming book on "World Religions and World Cultures; the Coming Dialogue"<sup>132</sup>.

True, Dr Kraemer's observation is quite general and refers to the Western world in its relation with Islam. But

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<sup>129</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 250.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. That book actually appeared under the title of World Cultures and World Religions. The Coming Dialogue.

the practical consequences for Christianity will escape no one and our author makes no bones about pointing out that "the Christian Church and those responsible for or active in Christian Missions in the Muslim world, are presented with an unprecedented challenge"<sup>133</sup>. This challenge for the Christian mission is none other than to find "new ways for true dialogue"<sup>134</sup>.

Plain dialogue as a missionary objective is again the theme that Dr Kraemer harps on in the "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten". "The important thing", he writes, "between Islam and Christianity is not any more the theological confrontation"<sup>135</sup>. In fact the day has not yet dawned "for a truly radical theological encounter that could at the same time be missionary"<sup>136</sup>. Is it then a matter of approach? Dr Kraemer thinks not. Nor should the theological encounter, he writes, "be replaced somehow by what since a few decades

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133 Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 250.

134 Ibid., p. 251.

135 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 28: "Schon deshalb kann die Hauptsache in der Begegnung zwischen der Welt des Islam und der christlichen Kirche nicht die theologische Auseinandersetzung sein."

136 Ibid., p. 27: "Die Zeit für eine wirklich grundsätzlichen theologische Begegnung, die auch missionarisch wirken kann, ist noch nicht angebrochen."

has been described as approach"<sup>137</sup>, that is to say one tries to develop a congenial view of Islam, avoids any delicate point of contention and stresses common elements of religious interest arising from mystical and moral life<sup>138</sup>. No, says Dr Kraemer, one should go further than that. He explains:

The question is not one of approach but of communication, of true dialogue, of true coming into contact with one another. Whereas approach in the best of cases means that an outsider is drawing closer with an offer of sympathy, through communication a real encounter is implied.<sup>139</sup>

Let us not understand Dr Kraemer wrong. When he appeals to the Church, he is not moved only by what might be called exclusive missionary motives such as, shall we say, the Christian encounter with the Arab world. What he sees in his global vision is the importance for the West and the East, as they are finally getting out of their isolation, to come to terms with each other. This is a vital question for

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137 Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 28: "Dies soll nun nicht etwa durch das ersetzt werden, was man seit einigen Jahrzehnten als approach (Annäherung) bezeichnet hat (...)"

138 Cf. Ibid.

139 Ibid., p. 29: "Nicht auf approach sondern auf Kommunikation (I) kommt es an, auf wirklichen Dialog, auf wirkliches In-Kontakt-Treten miteinander. Während approach im beste Falle eine Annäherung eines Aussenseiters bedeutet, der Sympathie aufbringt, handelt es sich in der Kommunikation um wirkliche Begegnung." Note 1 in this passage refers the reader to the German edition of Dr Kraemer's The Communication of the Christian Faith.

the world as a whole since the way things now stand the West needs the Arab world and the Arab world needs the West. With this before his eyes our author interprets the present situation of Islam as "a new summons to the Christian Church to comprehend anew its world responsibility"<sup>140</sup>. And this responsibility coincides with the commission the Church has received from its Lord. As the Muslim world slowly yields, or so it would appear, to the secular spirit of Western civilization, Dr Kraemer concludes that

in this lies not only a task for the Western world which has much to make up for regarding the Muslim world, but also a call to the Christian Church to reflect anew how one can in this Muslim world witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>141</sup>

These last words make quite clear Dr Kraemer's basic stand on the mission of the Church in the present circumstances. There is no surrender of that mission as the Church is ever bound to witness to Jesus Christ, although, as we have seen, the direct proclamation of the Gospel is now out of the question. In the case of the Arab nations in particular the call that is directed to the Church is that it should "walk in new ways

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<sup>140</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 30: "(...) ein neuer Appell an die christliche Kirche zu einer neuen Auffassung ihrer Weltverantwortlichkeit."

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 33: "Und darin liegt nicht nur für die westliche Welt ein Auftrag, die vieles der islamischen Welt gegenüber gutzumachen hat, sondern auch für die christliche Kirche ein Aufruf zu neuer Besinnung, wie man in dieser islamischen Welt das Evangelium von Jesus Christus bezeugen kann."

of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>142</sup>.

Which new ways and new ways for what? One can already answer the second part of the question. The new ways are meant for communication and communication, it is hoped, will eventually result in the much longed for dialogue and encounter. Whatever they turn out to be, the new ways must be conducive to the immediate goal of the Church's mission, namely to bring about communication with the House of Islam.

Before we set about looking more closely into the new ways Dr Kraemer proposes for the mission to Islam, let us first of all make sure whom he has in mind when he mentions the Church: The work of revising methods and shaping new ways of communication falls upon "the World Council of Churches, the International Missionary Council and all the missionary societies that are dealing with the world of Islam"<sup>143</sup>.

His remarks then are not restricted to those who have made Islam the field of their missionary calling. Actually, when it comes to missionary professionals and other people officially busy with the mission to Islam, our author voices

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<sup>142</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 250. Dr Kraemer's italics.

<sup>143</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 5: "(...) le Conseil Oecuménique des Eglises, le Conseil International des Missions, et toutes les Sociétés missionnaires qui s'occupent du monde musulman (...)".

some serious reservations. After stigmatizing "current Western evaluation and judgments" for being "outmoded"<sup>144</sup>, he gives missionary circles more of the same when he writes:

To go a step further, that section of "Christian" public opinion which has missionary interest in and concern for the Muslim world, labours under the same backwardness, although there are fortunately striking exceptions.<sup>145</sup>

He even refers in express words to the leaders and servants of the mission in the Muslim world and blames their efforts to hold on to the status quo. Generally speaking, he says,

all attention and concern is turned toward defense of still tenable positions, toward discussion (sic) of ways to maintain in some form the efforts and the witness. Frankly speaking, this seems to me to be a wrong orientation.<sup>146</sup>

Pending the conversion of missionaries, Dr Kraemer turns to the many Christians that are now invited from abroad to work in countries of the Muslim world. He is quick to point out the significance of their presence in those regions. He reminds them that "All those who work as Christians in the Muslim world, however humble their occupation, are caught up in an action of paramount importance"<sup>147</sup>.

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<sup>144</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 244.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>147</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 3: "Tous ceux qui travaillent comme chrétiens dans le monde musulman, quelque modeste que soit leur travail, sont inclus dans une action d'une importance considérable."

The same kind of observation recurs in "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten". With the demise of colonialism, Dr Kraemer writes, the Church must fall back upon its own natural resources in order to carry out "the Christian witness which always remains a command"<sup>148</sup>; in other words, it must rely on the witness of the indigenous Churches and also, he adds,

of the Christians who come from outside, and from the West too, and who work in some secular occupation or other within the realm of Islam. These are as everywhere, but especially here, more important than professional missionaries.<sup>149</sup>

Dr Kraemer would of course have a thought for theologians too. In World Cultures he tells his readers that "the 'dialogue' with the non-Christian religions should not only be the concern of a few so-called experts (...)"<sup>150</sup>. All Christians ought to be informed with the right notions about the great religious systems of the East. Therefore, Dr Kraemer argues, "The time has now arrived when all theological thinkers have to include these new worlds of thought

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<sup>148</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 29: "(...) für das christliche Zeugnis, das immer Gebot bleibt (...)"

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. "und sodann das Zeugnis der Christen, die von draussen, auch aus dem Westen kommen, und in islamischen Raum in irgendeiner weltlichen Funktion arbeiten. Diese sind wie überall, so besonders hier, wichtiger als Berufsmissionare."

<sup>150</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 365. On this point E.G. Parrinder finds himself in complete agreement with Dr Kraemer in Jesus in the Qur'ān, London, Faber and Faber, 1965, p. 14-15.

and apprehension in their sphere of interest"<sup>151</sup>. This is even more pressing when the prize at stake is the dialogue with a religion as tightly bound to Christianity as Islam is. In "L'Islam, une religion", our author is quite emphatic that Christian theologians should start taking notice of Muslim doctrine. Not content to suggest that "a study of Muslim theology is of great help in understanding Christian theology", he also avers that

it is not permissible for a Christian theologian to consider Islam as lying outside the field of his reflexion, if only for the importance that the Muslim world is assuming nowadays.<sup>152</sup>

Theologians might succeed in awaking the Christian Church and its faithful to their responsibilities towards the Muslim world, in much the same way and with the same earnestness that Dr Kraemer was himself trying to. Whether he seriously thought that his own entreaties would be heeded is another matter. His despondency crops out now and again, as when he laments that the eyes of most Christians are still shut<sup>153</sup> and that "Christians and Churches are not any nearer

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<sup>151</sup> Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 365.

<sup>152</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 36: "L'étude de la théologie musulmane aide beaucoup à comprendre la théologie chrétienne. Il n'est pas admissible pour un théologien chrétien de considérer l'Islam comme étant en dehors de son champ de réflexion; ne serait-ce que par l'importance même que prend le monde musulman aujourd'hui."

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 37.

to grasping the import of the Muslim problem for their own future"<sup>154</sup>.

What he was out to achieve and what he would have liked others to help him achieve was to free the Christian world from its hackneyed ideas and fanciful notions about Islam, since only a renewed vision would allow the Church to see which new paths it must tread in order to fulfil its mission to the Muslim world.

This takes us back to the first part of our earlier question: "Which new ways and new ways for what?" Without going into particulars, Dr Kraemer tells the Christian world on what practical basis it should rest its search for new ways of dialogue with Islam. He writes:

The unprecedentedness of the present situation as to possible new relationships consists in the fact that it depends on the vision of the "Christian" world whether or not the opportunity for finding new ways for true dialogue on the basis of disinterested service and identification with the needs and problems of the Muslim world in crisis is seen and seized.<sup>155</sup>

What the Church is seeking is true dialogue with Islam and for this it must look for new ways "on the basis of disinterested service and identification with the needs

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<sup>154</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 37: "(...) chrétiens et Eglises sont encore loin de saisir l'importance du problème de l'Islam pour leur propre avenir."

<sup>155</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 251. Dr Kraemer's italics.

of the Muslim world". In other words, the mission to Islam should go along the road of service, solidarity and sharing. Dr Kraemer insists that

one must take this road of service, of solidarity, of sharing in human interests in order to create a real opportunity for the preaching of the Gospel, in order to open up a new way in which opportunities for true dialogue will naturally develop.<sup>156</sup>

For him these suggestions are of such moment that they will bear repeating in the same article and, as he sums up his reflexions; he writes in terms that are hardly different from those just quoted:

For one must show in all manner of ways a spirit of solidarity, of disinterested service and make manifest the Christian presence, all this borne by persevering prayer, beseeching God that when it pleases Him the Muslim world may know Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 4: "(...) il faut prendre ce chemin de service, de solidarité, de partage des intérêts humains pour créer une vraie occasion d'annoncer l'Évangile, pour ouvrir une voie dans laquelle peuvent se développer naturellement des occasions de vrais dialogues." It is evident from this passage that Dr Kraemer is not thinking of service, solidarity and sharing as new ways to replace the preaching of the Gospel, but as steps that, apart from their own witnessing value, would be likely to render a proclamation of the Gospel possible and timely.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 38: "Mais il s'agit de montrer de toutes les façons un esprit de solidarité, de service désintéressé, de manifester une présence chrétienne, le tout appuyé sur une prière constante demandant qu'au temps qu'il plaira à Dieu, le monde musulman puisse connaître Jésus-Christ en esprit et en vérité."

In this last passage, to the categories of service, solidarity and sharing Dr Kraemer adds that of the Christian presence. He has already called our attention, as we saw, to the responsibility of those Christians whose services are required in Muslim territories. Obviously theirs is a form of Christian presence that must not be underestimated, since through them the true Christian reality can either be revealed or obscured.

Our author mentions another instance of that Christian presence. It is realized by those people who live in Muslim land with the express purpose of fostering communications between Christianity and Islam. Although he remains convinced that the time is not yet ripe for a truly theological encounter, Dr Kraemer is full of praise for those small groups of Christians whose action unfolds solely on the plane of the human and spiritual encounter. He refers to them in "L'Islam, une religion, un mode de vie"<sup>158</sup>, and again in his last composition Islam in a Christian Perspective. In his preface to that unfinished work he brings into focus, to quote his own words:

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158 Cf. Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 4.

the various new patterns of Christian behaviorism in the Muslim world as f.i. represented in Charles de Foucauld and his spiritual off-springs (sic), in the Pères Blancs, in the more recent experiments of "Présence Chrétienne" by the Benedictine monastery "Toumliline" and by various initial Protestant endeavours (...).<sup>159</sup>

All these initiatives Dr Kraemer places "in the same line of search for a genuinely Christian and human encounter"<sup>160</sup>.

Shall we conclude then that these are the new ways of the mission to Islam? Indeed they are, although one must agree that, all things considered, Dr Kraemer never really enlarged on them. But this survey would not be complete without listing yet another way of bringing Christianity and Islam closer which falls within the particular competence of the specialist. What Dr Kraemer was hoping Islamologists and theologians would do, he himself tried to accomplish when he started working at Islam in a Christian Perspective.

In World Cultures he had informed his readers that each of the great non-Christian religions and cultures deserved a special treatment of their own and that such books were on his programme<sup>161</sup>. He also said something that may

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<sup>159</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 6.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 10 and the footnote on p. 366.

have puzzled those who knew of his reservations on the benefits of theological controversy. After referring to a number of Muslim publications in which "the divinization of the Koran and the idealization of the Prophet as the perfect embodiment of the divine law (...)" are "presented as problemless indisputable truth"<sup>162</sup>, Dr Kraemer admits after all that controversy cannot be avoided. Let us listen to him:

"dialogue" cannot possibly escape controversy and mutual cross-questioning, not in the interest of refuting an opponent, but in the interest of straight thinking. The invigorating discipline of straight thinking as a service of mutual aid should not be suppressed by mistaken considerations of courtesy or generosity, or by concern for a reputation of broadmindedness.<sup>163</sup>

This was the spirit which Dr Kraemer would try to bring into his work on Islam in a Christian Perspective. The book he intends to write, he says, "can and should be conceived in a controversial spirit"<sup>164</sup>. But this must be a renewed form of controversy guided by a dialectical intention according to which everything is weighed "'sine ira et studio' and yet with true 'ira et studium' in the sense of real

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162 Kraemer, World Cultures, p. 362.

163 Ibid.

164 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 4. The text goes on: "in the sense in which this word is currently understood". One may suppose that a negative adjunct is missing (v.g. not in the sense, etc.) since Dr Kraemer is actually pleading for and trying to experiment with a new style of controversy.

passion for truth and fairness"<sup>165</sup>. Such an undertaking must be rooted in human solidarity and entered upon with true humility. Those dispositions are required in that kind of project, our author explains,

because its dialectical character requires the courage not to shun candidness and equally the alert readiness to rejoice in the discovery of obvious gems of truth and greatness.<sup>166</sup>

Dr Kraemer is convinced that this way of approaching Islam through "a reborn kind of controversy can become a legitimate and indispensable category"<sup>167</sup>, that it will help "in the newly-awakened search for true communication"<sup>168</sup>. In fact,

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<sup>165</sup> Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 4.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 5. This attitude towards non-Christian beliefs, which Dr Kraemer in The Christian Message called dialectical, goes back to his mission years. In his 1930 "Report on a Tour through the Bataklands", he urges the missionaries to penetrate into the pagan background of their Christians. "We should do this", he writes, "both in order to discover occasional real gems and in order to reveal the roots of the antagonism between the Gospel and paganism" (From Missionfield to Independent Church, p. 55). The long passage which concludes Section II of the Report is well worth studying as an illustration before the letter of Dr Kraemer's dialectical approach. In The Christian Message, p. 128, the author describes this approach as "a remarkable combination of down-right intrepidity and of radical humility." For more on the dialectical attitude of the missionary, cf. Ibid., p. 127-129.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. Dr Kraemer speaks of "the yearning for real 'meeting' and scrupulous fairness" expressed in contemporary literature and refers to K. Cragg's Sandals at the Mosque. Christian Presence amid Islam, London, SCM Press, 1959, 160 p., as "the best thought-out presentation and motivation of one of the most conspicuous endeavours of this sort." (Ibid.)

Dr Kraemer sees his future book on Islam in a Christian Perspective as one of the many initiatives expressing "longing for a new mode of intercourse and discourse between Christianity and Islam"<sup>169</sup>. The other experiments in communication and his own intended study of Islam, he wrote, "belong organically together"<sup>170</sup> and are all aimed at "interpreting the mind of Christ in interhuman and inter-religious relationships"<sup>171</sup>. What moved him in the first place was a desire to broaden the Church's knowledge and understanding of Islam. Islam in a Christian Perspective was meant, he wrote, "for theologians and missionaries, for Christians interested in Islam for various reasons, and for educated Muslims"<sup>172</sup>. He was also spurred by evidence of new trends in the House of Islam, such as the openness shown by a growing number of Muslim writers and thinkers who did not conceal their interest for Christian Scriptures and theology.

A longer journey through Dr Kraemer's writings would probably yield little else on the new ways of the mission to the Arab world, except perhaps what he tells us by way of

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169 Kraemer, Islam in a Christian Perspective, p. 6.

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid., p. 2.

warning in "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten". He sternly reminds the Church and all those connected with the mission to Islam that the human encounter is on no account to be thought of as a mere device: it is an essential part of Christian charity. He writes:

The apparent roundabout way through the human encounter ought not to be understood as a tactic; it is on the contrary a command from Christian love that has to be understood anew.<sup>173</sup>

What Dr Kraemer proposes is not a devious way of reintroducing the traditional missions under the pretences of service, solidarity or sharing. In one of the books he wrote at about that time, A Theology of the Laity, he puts the Church on its guard against "a camouflaged form of Missions". His words are well worth quoting here since they make clear how our author understands Christian service and solidarity. He writes:

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<sup>173</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 36: "Der scheinbare Umweg über die mitmenschliche Begegnung darf nicht als Taktik verstanden werden, sondern ist ein Gebot der neu zu verstehenden christlichen Liebe."

The "world-diakonia" of the Church, which has entered into the ecumenical realm of discussion and action, can only be truly preserved from the danger of becoming either a humanitarian action with some Christian colouring, or a camouflaged form of Missions (1), if it has its basic motivation and its inspiration in this view of Christ the Diakonos, in whom all diakonia as response to His diakonia is at the same time a religious confession and an act of specific ethical quality.<sup>174</sup>

For the honour of the Christian Church and for the sake of honesty Dr Kraemer insists on the disinterested character which must be the hallmark of the new ways of the mission to Islam. These are not a clever manoeuvre or a subtle form of propaganda in order to bring in new conversions. These new ways are perceived as the best means of discharging a long-standing debt that the Church owes the Muslim world, namely "the manifestation of the true Christian reality"<sup>175</sup>. And Dr Kraemer believes that they might at long last allow Islam to set eyes on "the Christian Church as she is according to her true nature and calling" instead of being "presented with lamentable caricatures"<sup>176</sup>.

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<sup>174</sup> Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, p. 149. Footnote 1 reads: "At any rate, the non-Christians will interpret it in that way."

<sup>175</sup> Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 38: "L'Eglise chrétienne a une dette à l'égard du monde musulman: c'est la manifestation de la vraie réalité chrétienne."

<sup>176</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 251.

B. The Mission to Islam in the Non-Arab World.

Whenever Dr Kraemer speaks of a reorientation of the mission to Islam, he is careful to point out that he has "in fact in mind the Arabic-speaking Muslim world"<sup>177</sup>. More specifically he writes:

In the Arabic-speaking countries direct organized evangelical work appears hopeless. This does not apply to the great marginal countries of Islam, such as Indonesia, Africa south of the Sahara, and so on.<sup>178</sup>

As a matter of interest we may observe that this combined mention of Africa and Indonesia is by no means a novelty in Dr Kraemer's writings. Some twenty years earlier he had already spoken of those two regions in The Christian Message in the following terms:

Africa and the Dutch East Indies, the two great territories where Islam and Christianity are both spreading rapidly and where paganism as an established religion is on the brink of disappearing, will become in the near future the places where these two religions are the only official religions that occupy the field.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 248. See also Kraemer, "L'Islam, une religion", p. 5.

<sup>178</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 29: "In den arabisch sprechenden Ländern erscheint direkte, organisierte, evangelistische Missionsarbeit aussichtslos. Das trifft nicht zu für die grossen Randgebiete des Islam wie Indonesien, Afrika südlich der Sahara usw."

<sup>179</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 364.

He had also warned the missionaries that they would very soon be faced with the task of getting the Churches of those territories ready to deal with Islam "in a way that does not fall far short of the spirit of Christ and the religious character of Christianity" 180.

Twenty years later He does not think that missionaries have paid much attention to his advice regarding Africa. He hardly conceals his bitterness in "Mission im Wandel" as he passes strictures on the missionaries and their short-sighted policies.

It is frightening to notice that the missions and indigenous Churches in Africa only now acknowledge the "danger" of Islam and of its extension and admits besides that they stand helpless because one does not know Islam, especially African Islam; and that the indigenous Churches, as a result of a faulty missionary education, not only live in ignorance of that powerful competitor for the soul of Africa, but moreover are still blind to the duty that is laid upon them in their common life with it. 181

Apart from this remark on the responsibility of the young Christian Churches Dr Kraemer did not say more about the

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180 Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 365.

181 Kraemer, "Mission im Wandel", p. 294: "Es ist erschreckend wahrzunehmen, dass Mission und einheimische Kirchen in Afrika erst jetzt die "Gefahr" des Islams und seiner Ausbreitung erkennen und dabei bekennen, hilflos dazustehen, weil man den Islam, besonders den afrikanischen Islam, nicht kennt, und die einheimischen Kirchen als Folge der missionarischen Fehlerziehung nicht nur in Ignoranz dieses gewaltigen Mitbewerbers um die Seele Afrikas leben, sondern auch noch blind für die Aufgabe sind, die ihnen im Zusammenleben mit ihm aufgetragen ist."

mission to African Islam south of the Sahara.

His comments on the Christian mission in Indonesia are more extensive. When he wrote on "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia" in 1953 he spoke of Indonesia as "a largely Muslim country"<sup>182</sup>, and had only praises for the missionary spirit that animated the local Christian congregations. He points out that

(...) the most remarkable thing is the existence of two Churches in Java (which for four centuries has been Islamic), one in the east and one in the centre. These churches, numbering together more than 50,000 members, have grown out of converts from Islam, and are, even in the present difficult circumstances, resolutely missionary - a situation that is unique in the whole history of missions to Islam.<sup>183</sup>

In a contribution to a later work, Balans van Beleid published in 1961, Dr Kraemer again made reference to that remarkable exception to the rule in the Muslim world. After mentioning the obdurate fears of the Dutch colonial administration regarding Muslim fanaticism, he observes that, on the contrary,

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<sup>182</sup> Kraemer, "The Christian Church in Non-Communist Muslim Asia", p. 150.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

Java is among all Muslim countries of the world the only Muslim territory where in the west, in the centre and in the east, through the activity of the mission, indigenous, living, self-propagating Churches have sprung into existence, won over from a population which as a matter of course regards itself as belonging to Islam and is linked to it in varying degrees of intensity.<sup>184</sup>

Dr Kraemer might have told us more about the new ways of the mission to Islam in what he refers to in "Islamic Culture" as "the vast Islamic expansions in Africa south of the Sahara, India, Indonesia, Pakistan etc."<sup>185</sup>. He chose not to. He only stressed that he did not want his remarks in that article to apply to those countries. As he put it:

The rest of the total Muslim world is, from the missionary point of view, equally important, but its special problems cannot be discussed and characterized in the compass of this article.<sup>186</sup>

We may regret that our author told us so little about the mission in those other regions. But with that little we shall have to rest content.

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<sup>184</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, "De Zending en Nederlands-Indie", in Balans van Beleid, Edited by H. Baudet and I.J. Brugmans, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1961, p. 305-306: "Java onder alle moslimse landen der wereld het enige moslimse gebied is, waar in het Westen, het Midden en het Oosten door de werkzaamheid der zending inheemse, levende, zichzelf uitbreidende kerken zijn ontstaan, gewonnen uit een bevolking, die zichzelf als vanzelfsprekend tot de islam acht te behoren en in verschillende graden van intensiteit aan de islam verknocht is."

<sup>185</sup> Kraemer, "Islamic Culture", p. 248.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

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Now that we have pieced together Dr Kraemer's second thoughts on the mission to Islam, the essentials stand out clearly. One element in particular recurs with striking frequency: the spirit of service that should move the Christian Church in its contacts with Islam. Dr Kraemer is not in this matter led by mere motives of opportunity. The truth is that the idea of the Christian mission to Islam on the basis of disinterested service has its roots in none other than his own theological reflexion.

When our author is pressing the Church to be true to its nature and to show in its dealings with Islam what Christianity truly is, he is merely urging the Christian Church to continue in respect of Islam the service of Jesus Christ to the world. To put it otherwise, the new ways of the mission to Islam, which he insists should be those of service, solidarity and sharing, are the ways that the Lord is now suggesting to his Church if it would eventually proclaim his Gospel to the House of Islam.

This reflexion of Dr Kraemer's on the Church throws light on the problem of conversion which after all can hardly be waved aside when the subject of mission arises. Whatever the Church does, it does on behalf of its Lord. What results from the specific quality of the Church's activity is that

"all ministry is a witness to Christ, an overt or covert invitation to accept Him as the Lord of all life and each individual life"<sup>187</sup>. To spell it out, the ministry or the service of the Church as witness to Christ always conveys an invitation to conversion.

This does not clash with the recommendation that with the passing of the colonial phase the Church should now give up any systematic activity intended to secure the conversion of the Muslims in Arabic-speaking lands. What Dr Kraemer is in effect saying is that the Christian Church in those lands should now desist from a missionary strategy thought out, set up and carried out as a converting drive against Islam. He does not say, nor can he say, that the Church should tear off its witness and service from the wish and hope and prayer that the whole world, including the House of Islam, shall bow to the Lordship of its Saviour Jesus Christ and surrender to him and be reconciled with God and therefore be converted.

So much for the Christian mission in the Arabic-speaking regions of the world. One will regret that Dr Kraemer spoke so sparingly about the Christian mission in other Muslim countries. Although he definitely stated that his plea for a rethinking of the mission was made only in

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<sup>187</sup> Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, p. 137.

respect of Arab countries, there are obvious reasons to think that his remarks would fit the situation of such countries as Iran and Pakistan, where culture and religion are so tightly welded together that any direct evangelical initiative would defeat its own purpose.

It would have been even more interesting had Dr Kraemer taken us into his confidence about the mission inside the regions lying on the fringe of the House of Islam, particularly Indonesia and Africa south of the Sahara. The Church enjoys in those parts of the world the awesome privilege of being in a position to carry on its mission under conditions, favourable up to a point, that are totally lacking in countries whose official fealty is sworn to Islam.

However, one may be sure that in all cases and under whatever circumstances the Kraemerian understanding of the Christian mission in a post-colonial world can be summed up as the duty laid upon the Church first and foremost to become more and more faithful to its nature by living up to the Christian commitment of witness and service. This holds true in respect of all countries where the Umma of the Prophet struck root, whether in Islam's native lands like Egypt and Syria, in the later adopted territories of Iran and Pakistan, or in such regions as Indonesia and the Sahel where thriving Christian communities live in daily contact with overwhelmingly large Muslim communities.

Nothing will conclude these pages better than a last mention of Dr Kraemer's ever-present concern for Christian unity. True enough, ecumenism has hardly been referred to at all in our survey of Dr Kraemer's second thoughts on the mission to Islam. However, in one of his last writings on Islam he did again come back to that sensitive question. He reminded us that unity was an essential mark of a witnessing Church whose existence also belonged to another dimension than the world. "For this reason", he insisted, "the ecumenical movement is of more direct and fundamental significance for missionary work, especially in the world of Islam"<sup>188</sup>. One may express the wish that all missionaries to Islam and the Christian communities shall henceforth live by the same yearning for unity that moved and constrained our Dr Kraemer. It would prevent their work from being mere pottering in the porch<sup>189</sup>.

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<sup>188</sup> Kraemer, "Die grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeiten", p. 27: "Darum ist die ökumenische Bewegung von direkter und fundamentaler Bedeutung für die missionarische Arbeit, zumal in der Welt des Islam."

<sup>189</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* Dr Kraemer writes: "Solange wie diesen Beweis nicht haben, und dazu gehört auch die Einheit der Kirche, ist all unser Werk nur ein bisschen Vorhofsarbeit."

## CONCLUSION

In 1930, when he was still in Java, Dr Kraemer wrote a few pages on "Christianity and Secularism"<sup>1</sup>. This short essay cannot be called an early writing for its author was past forty when he published it. Measured by the yardstick of length and impact it can hardly be considered an important writing either, since De strijd over Bali en de Zending<sup>2</sup> and The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World<sup>3</sup> were much longer, stirred a good deal of controversy, and had far deeper consequences for the missions.

Still, it would be a mistake to overlook the significance of that short composition. For "Christianity and Secularism", notwithstanding its title, is mostly about revelation. And as one reads those few pages, in which mention of revelation recurs with arresting frequency, it is suddenly borne in upon one that there lies the key to an understanding of Dr Kraemer's teaching on the mission and the Church, and indeed the secret of his own missionary zeal.

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1 Hendrik Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", in The International Review of Missions, Vol. 19, No. 2, April 1930, p. 195-208.

2 Hendrik Kraemer, De strijd over Bali en de Zending. Een studie en een appel, Amsterdam, H.J. Paris, 1933, 141 p.

3 Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1938, xvi-455 p.

What we have in mind appears best in two short passages from that piece of writing. Early in his article Dr Kraemer remarks that mission-minded Christians are now convinced that

an entirely new orientation is necessary, a deeper realization of the essential character of the revelation of God in Christ, and of the resulting consequences for life and thought.<sup>4</sup>

Further on, the author refers to the challenge put up to Christianity by a secularized world. He explains what this situation implies for Christians. He writes:

This will mean for ourselves a process of purification, a much-needed purification indeed, and more than that: it is a judgment on ourselves, a journey of research into the original dynamics of divine revelation.<sup>5</sup>

"The essential character of the revelation of God in Christ" and "the original dynamics of the divine revelation": these two phrases yield the kernel of his thought on the Church, the mission and religion. We dare to say that they also reveal for us the motive force of his life.

We are not here concerned with the details of Dr Kraemer's career as a servant of Christ, the Church, the mission and the world. What we wish to bring out is how the way he understood revelation accounts for the inner unity of his teaching on the Church and the mission. This judgment

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<sup>4</sup> Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 205-206.

extends to his views on the mission to Islam, whether they are those he expressed earlier in life during the colonial period or the ones he later formulated as a rethinking of the mission to the Arabic-speaking countries of the Muslim world.

How did he understand revelation then? That Dr Kraemer had definite ideas about revelation nobody will deny. But the controversial tone of his argumentation did not always make for the clarity of what he felt obliged to say in order to vindicate the specific quality of Christian revelation. On the other hand one often senses that what he is trying to convey springs from a deep religious experience. Those critics of his that were more concerned to find fault with his terminology or to pick holes in his logic were not likely to get at his meaning.

The gist of what Dr Kraemer told us may be put down as follows. The fact of revelation is central to the Christian faith which can only be properly understood "in the sense of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Truth and the Life"<sup>6</sup>. The pith of these words is that revelation connotes a concrete and active motion and not an abstract concept. Dr Kraemer was adamant that Christian revelation ought not to be reduced to a set of ideas. By the

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<sup>6</sup> Kraemer, "Christianity and Secularism", p. 205.

same token he speaks of the dynamics of revelation since it "is no object, but an action, a divine movement"<sup>7</sup>.

Thus does history come into its full significance. A dynamic conception of revelation has very practical consequences as Dr Kraemer is at pains to point out in his writings. It means first and foremost that

God is the God of history. History is not a reproduction of the cyclic course of nature, but God's Will is the transcendent force and the end of history.<sup>8</sup>

This view offers a simple explanation for Dr Kraemer's biblical realism, which caused so much stir amongst thinkers of the mission in the forties and fifties and to which his name is now indissolubly wedded. His insistence on biblical realism was basically a plea with the Christian Church, and the missionaries in particular, to take God's deeds in history with the same earnestness that had led to their being recorded in the Bible.

Dr Kraemer's writings on the mission to Islam afford a good illustration of this. When he stressed the urgency of rethinking the mission to Islam, he did not claim that he had found a new meaning to the Christian mission. He was inciting the Church and the Christian mission to what in

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<sup>7</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 428.

earlier days he had called "an act of obedience to the peculiar historical situation"<sup>9</sup>. Only one little acquainted with Dr Kraemer's thinking could show surprise at his advocating new ways for the mission to Islam. Was it not he in 1938 that had warned the Church that the need of the hour was for a "fundamental re-orientation regarding its relation to the world and all its spheres"<sup>10</sup> and had further stated that the times required "a complete overhauling of missionary principles and methods"<sup>11</sup>? He would return to the charge in 1953 when reporting on the conditions in which the Christian Church lived in Muslim Asia, insisting again that a rethinking and remodelling of the work of the missions was urgently called for. \*

It was not obsession with change that moved him. When he had pleaded for "a missiology of change" in The Christian Message<sup>12</sup>, what concerned him most was not the change in itself, but the change required to live in obedience to God's will manifested in history. It was once suggested that Dr Kraemer's theology of the Church was essentially a theology of obedience. And indeed the word obedience recurs

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<sup>9</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 421.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

frequently under his pen whether he writes to his own Church in Holland during the war years or whether he addresses the Church Universal on its relation to the House of Islam.

However, defining Dr Kraemer's reflexion on the Church as a theology of obedience must not obscure the point that such obedience would be without meaning or content unless it could be related to a design that was somehow made manifest in history. To such manifestations our author calls the Church's attention when he refers to the signs of the times, a phrase which he uses in De roeping der Kerk in 1945<sup>13</sup> and which recurs as a theme in A Theology of the Laity in 1958<sup>14</sup>. Signs may be seen in the world about us only if God is active in the history of man. Or, to put it differently, there can be no signs but for a dynamic conception of that revelation which, having reached its final stage in Jesus Christ, continues alive in history until the Kingdom of God is fully realized.

Dr Kraemer reads the signs as indications of God's will and as a summons to the Church to walk in new ways of obedience. Since the signs must first be interpreted in faith, Dr Kraemer's general trend of thought may be aptly

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13 Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, De roeping der Kerk, 's-Gravenhage, D.A. Daamen, 1945, p. 14 and 113.

14 Cf. Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity, London, Lutterworth Press, 1958, Chapter One "The Signs of the Times", p. 17-47.

described as a theology of discernment in which revelation, the will of God and obedience are the three natural elements. But this is not a matter of great moment and should not offer cause for cavil.

What we wish to emphasise in these concluding notes about Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam, both in their traditional expression and in their later formulation, is, to use a paradox after the manner of our author, the continuity that the discontinuity of these views supposes. New ways in obedience do not go without change and rupture for the same reason that neither does conversion. But obedience, grounded in the conviction that God is at work in history, always supposes the fidelity that tries to make out God's will for the present times. Dr Kraemer's teaching on the mission to Islam is no exception to this basic rule of Christian faith.

In our remarks so far we have insisted on how consistent Dr Kraemer's views on the mission to Islam were with his understanding of revelation, even though on certain points he had second thoughts towards the end of his life. Still, and without condemning him for changing his mind, one is allowed to ask whether there is much left in what he wrote that is still worth the while of the Christian who would witness to Jesus Christ in the Muslim world. One might as well put the question bluntly: does there remain anything

of lasting value in what Dr Kraemer told us about the mission to Islam?

The missionary who happens to read Dr Kraemer's writings on the mission, specially the mission to Islam - a difficult task considering that they still stand scattered in a variety of publications - that missionary will no doubt feel little interest for some of his more embracing views, for instance his vision of an ongoing encounter between East and West. Yet only a fool could deny that closer contacts are presently developing between the Western countries and important sectors of the Eastern Muslim world, contacts that are at times little short of clashes. Moreover, the words Arab invasion apply very well to the rapid growth of capital invested in Europe and North America by the OPEC nations. One may even speak of a Muslim invasion if one thinks of countries like England, France and Germany where there now live large numbers of Muslim immigrants and workers. In this last case one is reminded of Dr Kraemer's remark that the Christian Church has special obligations towards Islam.

It is to be expected too that yet others interested in Islam for the sake of Jesus Christ will differ with certain of Dr Kraemer's conclusions, perhaps for the same reasons that a number of orientalist do. Not all will agree that mysticism is an alien growth in the religious system of Islam. They will prefer to abide by Louis Massignon's conviction in

this matter and may even feel tempted to put down Dr Kraemer's deep-seated distrust of mysticism to the Christian tradition to which he belonged.

Other Christians living in the Muslim world will also take issue with our author's contention that the faith of the Prophet represents a superficial form of religion. It seems all too easy to see in any non-Christian religion a shallow one as soon as the standard adopted is that of the Christian faith. According to Dr Kraemer Islam should and could go back to the religious purity of its origins. Yet Islam gave to the world a thinker like Ghazzālī whom our author himself called the Augustine of Muslim theology. On the question of shallowness it would seem a fair test to judge a religion after the way it was lived by the best of its members.

A missionary will doubt whether the assertion that Allah is not the God of Jesus Christ conveys as much truth as it would on the face of it appear to. Muḥammad made a point of presenting his God as that of the prophets from Adam to Jesus the Messiah. If the God of Muḥammad is not the God of Jesus Christ, then to Dr Kraemer and to all Christians that God is nothing at all, just an empty name that refers to nobody. Surely our author never thought that the faithful Muslim in his prayer did not reach God. Otherwise, how could he recommend that the exchange between the

Christian and the Muslim should remain on the plane of man's relation with God: whose God?

Finally one ought to mention that missionaries who take of man's religions a theological view that is at variance with Dr Kraemer's are likely to perceive Islam in a more favourable light than he. A religion that is by birthright so close to Christianity, professes to honour the God of Abraham and Moses, and venerates Jesus in an especial manner, surely that religion should be regarded as holding a significance of its own in God's design of reconciliation with man.

Those are some of the points on which Dr Kraemer cannot expect all servants of the mission in Muslim countries to agree with him. There is all the same a good deal of his advice that they should accept with sincere gratitude because they will find in it a Christian wisdom that will not lose its timeliness. For one thing, the missionary will be comforted by Dr Kraemer's personal conviction that the claim of Jesus Christ to the obedience of all men includes those who live in the House of Islam. He may be put out at first by the radical changes that our author has recommended. These call for a conversion in the Church and its missionaries, and conversion is always a painful process. But the intention that dictated the changes was obedience to Jesus Christ and the principle of the Christian witness to be given to all.

nations remains unaffected.

The messenger of the Gospel in the Muslim world had to be told that his role would change and its importance dwindle while an increasing share of his missionary responsibilities would be taken over by the indigenous Christian communities. He had also to be warned that in some regions of the world his presence as apostle of Jesus Christ would not any more be tolerated. The facts have borne out Dr Kraemer's foresight on all those points. Even in territories that still grant entry to the foreign missionary he is no more the leader or the guide, but he who is accepted as the trusted helper of a Church whose prime duty it is to witness to Jesus Christ in its own environment. This teaching of Dr Kraemer's on the obligations of the local congregations applies with special relevance to the situation of some Churches which are left to shift for themselves in the absence of any outside assistance.

A perception of the missionary as a simple servant is altogether in the line of Dr Kraemer's thought on the Christian mission. As the conditions of the mission to Islam grew more difficult it was opportune to point out to the Church that witness could be rendered to Jesus Christ in the Muslim countries by any Christian under the form of disinterested service aimed at helping people to improve social conditions, overcome economic problems or deal with special

emergencies. Dr Kraemer's suggestion that contacts between Muslims and Christians should occur on the plane of human relations and interests was not a half-veiled hint that Christians should for a time leave their Christian commitment in abeyance. His idea was rather that a Christian must show himself a better man at whatever he does.

However, Dr Kraemer's emphasis on mission as service is not intended as a dissuasion from all forms of dialogue with Islam. On this point his suggestions are still valuable for the Christian theologian or the missionary who is engaged in the field of interreligious relations with his Muslim counterpart. Our author insists that the exchange should be conducted at the purely religious level where man and God meet, while reminding the Church that Christianity, like Islam, did not in the past escape the allurements of doctrinal systems nor did it always overcome the temptation that besets all religious sects, namely that of seeking only the triumph of their ideas. Indeed, no one should consider himself a possessor of the truth. From a psychological point of view this is the most exacting demand that Dr Kraemer can make on a man who is sincerely convinced that God did reveal himself in Jesus Christ or through the Prophet Muhammad. Dr Kraemer is right if he means, as we think he does, that we are all seekers after a truth that no one can boast of having ever apprehended in its totality. Only this humble

state of mind can argue the sincerity of both Christian and Muslim pursuing a conversation that finds its main points of contact in a deep belief in God's concern for man and a genuine desire to serve him as he wishes to be served.

There is a touch of the pathetic in the honesty which compels Dr Kraemer to repeat to his Church that it could take the mission to Arabic-speaking countries only owing to the fortuitous detours of history, that the presence of its missionaries in those lands was made possible by the protection of foreign powers and that the Muslim peoples it sought for Christ had resigned themselves to its evangelism only under duress. Now he is inviting the Church to look into its past motivations and rethink its Christian vocation in the light of what is happening in the Muslim world. Islam itself forces it to an examination of conscience and to a reassessment of its mission. The Church was taught patience by Islam; it is now taught that it should free itself of any idea of spiritual conquest. The one way still open to it, Dr Kraemer insists, is the humble path of service already traced out for it by its Lord.

The practical sequels of that situation are particularly upsetting for the missionary. After regarding himself as essentially the messenger of the Gospel he now finds that in most Muslim countries he is officially and legally debarred from fulfilling what he thought was his

only raison d'être. Dr Kraemer's words to the Church he must obviously apply to himself as well. The Churches' shortcomings and failures were his own; the Church's new missionary ways should be his too. After all, Dr Kraemer might tell him, they are ways that are more in keeping with that respect of religious sensibilities which has so often been lacking in the Christian approach to the Muslim people.

In what Dr Kraemer told the Christian Church about its duties towards the House of Islam, one finds encouragement, advice and blame. He did not hesitate to censure the Churches for the misshapen image of Christianity that they were offering to the Muslim world. It was, he complained, the picture of a family split by doctrinal differences, estranged by mutual suspicion and deeply wounded by selfish competition.

After going through the record of the Christian Churches in the matter of brotherly love and mutual help between missionaries of different confessions, one is left with a bitter after-taste. Time and again Dr Kraemer underlined the importance of Christian unity. In season and out of season he strove to impress upon the missionaries to Islam the need for ecumenical cooperation. Have the missionaries who read him and the Churches who heard him fully grasped how necessary new attitudes based on ecumenical comprehension have become for the witness of the Gospel to Islam? It will remain to Dr Kraemer's credit that some of them have at last

seen their mistakes in this matter, those of their organizations, of their own Churches and, sad to say, of the Christian congregations they themselves built up in the midst of Islam. But we doubt very much whether all those whom Dr Kraemer could reach always reacted in this positive way to his entreaties for more ecumenical unity between the Christian Churches and between their missionaries. In any event Dr Kraemer's pleas for unity between the missionary Churches in particular do not add anything to John 17:21. They just confirm how little the Churches have understood the Gospel that they profess to preach.

One must conclude. If we were asked what we found most compelling in Dr Kraemer's teaching on the mission to Islam, we should be tempted to offer a triple comment by way of an answer. As regards the Christian Church, Dr Kraemer's reflexion on its obligations towards the House of Islam is a matter that it should take to heart with all the seriousness that a Christian duty calls for. Concerning the local Christian congregations, we totally agree that it now lies with them to offer to Islam a true picture of the faith of Christ. Finally, if a missionary may be allowed to speak for other missionaries, Dr Kraemer need not any more in the present state of affairs remind us that we are useless servants. But we shall be inspired by his conviction that the Kingdom of God is the end of history and, like him, tie

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our hope to the "unshakable trust that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will realize this end through, and despite, human forces at the time of His pleasure"<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Kraemer, The Christian Message, p. 428.

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