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Greg Parsons,  
Editorial Director,  
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*Dear Greg Parsons.*

Thankyou warmly for your phone call last Friday. I thought I would respond without delay so have put together the enclosed for your consideration, in reply. Please use your editorial freedom to use, or otherwise or let me know if you want to 'adjust.' I have tried to cover what it seems urgent to try to say.

I mentioned Dr Charles Beckett and his 'Fast Track.' He is trying to alert churches in the Virginia/Richmond area to the Muslim presence but also circulate his information Papers quite widely. I am sure he would be pleased to be in contact with you and the Journal and maybe co-operate. His address is:

EAST TRACK, 8207, Westdale Lane,  
Richmond. VA. 23229-4149.

With greetings in Christ,

Sincerely yours,

*Kenneth Cragg.*

Kenneth Cragg.

*Apologies for my amateur typing.*

Changing time and setting, perhaps we could say that the closest the Qur'an comes to the enormity of September 11th in New York is where Surah 100 deplures the callous raid across the desert sands: 'By the snorting war-horses that strike fire with their hoofs as they storm forward at dawn, a single host in the midst of their dust-cloud!' A far cry, to be sure, from the spreading clouds of dust and debris in the collapse of towering edifices sheaved in flame. The cunning, the venom, the hatred, the enmity, were the same. The passage goes on: 'Man is indeed graceless with his Lord: witness what he does. Violent is he in his passion ..Is he not aware that their Lord is cognisant of everything about them on the day when the tombs yield up their dead and all men's hidden thoughts are public knowledge ?'

The reproach of the vile plunderer is complete, even if eternal nemesis can be shrugged away. There speaks the Islam of which we rightly say, appalled at September 11th: 'That was not Islam.' It was not the Islam of the poet Hafiz with his lyrics of humility; not the Islam that built the Sulymaniyyah Mosque in Istanbul or erected the Taj Mahal. To urge this 'not Islam' is true as well as prudent. For backlash is ugly and only aggravates further and ignores our own misdeeds.

Yet, tragically, September 11th was Islam, the other Islam. We indulge in idle fantasy to persuade ourselves otherwise and quite fail to help the heirs of the one Islam to repudiate or transform the other. It is entirely clear that Islam was and is a story of two cities, Mecca and Medina. In the former, the Prophet was repeatedly enjoined: 'Your sole task, your only duty, is the message' of the Unity of God and the sin of idolatry. He was only 'the messenger with the word' in trust, insistenty confined to persuasion, exposed to suffering on its behalf. After thirteen years came (by no clear directive that survives in the Qur'an) the decision to emigrate to Medina which steadily became a base for armed action against Mecca which, after eight more years, surrendered and the message 'prevailed' by dint of power wielded. From the date of that emigration (622 A.D.) the Islamic Calendar begins and, from 632 when Muhammad died, the wide expansion as far as western Europe and eastward beyond Sind and the Punjab confirmed that perception of a powered legitimacy. Islam achieved — what the Book calls 'great and manifest victory,' and always has seen itself as a faith that governs and must everywhere seek to do so as the necessary concomitant of the faith.

Hence the necessary conclusion of the two Islams -- two at least, ignoring sub sects and nuances. However, there can be no denying the abiding priority of Mecca. It is the Meccan message that the Shahadah (or confessio) affirms: 'Muhammad is the Rasul of Allah,' i.e. not the 'generalissimo, but the one who has the Risalah. It is to Mecca that the ritual pilgrimage makes its way, as to the navel of the earth. It is on the axis to Mecca that every mosque worldwide is meticulously fronting by its directional niche. Historically, it was for the sake of the Meccan witness (no wild brigandage) that the Medinan campaigns were designed and fought.

Therefore, one clear clue now to 'which Islam?' must be the fact that world Islam today can be, needs to be, seen as in its prime Meccan situation -- not, to be sure the persecution part which far and wide does not obtain -- but the vocation to be only and essentially a religious witness that neither enjoys power to impose itself, nor covets it, still less turns it to sheer brutality.

It is true that Islam in Medinan temper finds this 'being essentially religious only' highly uncongenial, indeed a contradiction since Din and Dawlah, belief and state-power, must never be divorced. Islam cannot but be ruling -- and ruling on its own terms, and deciding what minorities it will allow and how. Yet Meccan priority, in terms of a 21st century, must argue an Islam that prays, fasts, makes pilgrimage, cares for social justice, witnesses and, with all these, tolerates diversity in constructive hope.

Why must argue? One reason is that some 25% of the world's total Muslims are now without occasion of Islamic power -- in India, the West and elsewhere. Short of fond dreams of Islamising these areas in power terms, they are Meccans by fact of accepted non-Islamic citizenships in which they can play a full religious part. Further, there are Arab and African states, like Egypt or Nigeria, with sizeable Muslim and other than Muslim populations sharing common statehood where the common good argues the concept of a state that 'holds a neutral ring' for the constituent faiths and imposes none as. Such 'secular' statehood (if we call it such) in its 'indifference' to the citizens' creed, within public order) need in no way mean 'secularisation,' i.e. repudiation of all worship. A faith that has been historically primary can well remain so in such tolerance.

Finally, the world is urgent for state sovereignties that recognise 'the right of human rights' to cross their sacred borders and assert a global conscience, not to be denied by claims

only national power prevails inside those borders. Women's rights and movements for them are a vital factor in this regard. We are facing the need to transcend the nation-state. Religions that have long claimed and wielded its power have to revise their perceptions accordingly.

All of which stresses that Meccan-style witness has always been, and now should essentially become, the quality of the Islam Islam needs to be in our contemporary world. The duty, surely, of all other belief-systems in any inter-association is to serve, as wisdom may allow, in helping it to think so.

But, it will be said, this Medinan dimension of Islam is explicit in the Sirah, or life-course, of the Prophet: It is embedded inextricably in the fabric of the Qur'an, with its Meccan and Medinan chapters all identified as such. How then can Islam ever be other than both Meccan and Medinan, with all the familiar consequences of Did and Dawlah never to be divorced?

This is indeed a formidable issue — one that has to be in Muslim hands. But, given the situation outlined earlier, there is a discernible solution at hand. By all means the Medinan Qur'an will remain, but it can <sup>be</sup> reasonably argued that the power dimension, as right and urgent then, —→ can no longer be so now. There was a de facto case for armed power in 7th century Arabia where tribal feuds were impeding wider peace and patron deities sanctioned the warring tribes. That society was an ad hoc case for the pacification Islam did in fact aim to provide, even when the Caliphate found that it had interneccine troubles of its own. Accents could remain in a Scripture even when faith believed it had overtaken the times to which they related. (Is it not so for Christians with the imprecatory psalms?) Muslims hold that Islam is a final 'mercy to the worlds.' What is 'final' has to be abreast of how times change and Allah, as the Qur'an says, is 'Not to be overtaken' by the developments of centuries.

So the priority of Meccan Islam emerges more evident still, for all that Medina remains in the text. Moreover, there has always been 'abrogation' (naskh) in the Qur'an, whereby one thing abrogated another when they seemed to contradict. Naskh has been ~~in~~ favour the later against the earlier. What is urgent now could be understood as 'abrogation' the other way round.

Where, though, would all this take the Christian mission?

The task to which it is commissioned is 'the preaching of the Word,' a calling it can never renounce. For to renounce it would imply that there were times or places to which the Gospel was not owed, that it had somehow become the property of those who happened to know it or had been born under it. That would be a travesty of the Church. For there is nowhere in the world, except Galilee and Jerusalem, to which Christian faith was not brought and where, apart from such loyal bringing at some point, it would not now be known. Every church, however ancient, was in debt to mission. That debt makes payment of it perennial in every age.

Yet, as well as the seeking of the personal hearer, the task of finding 'disciples', is there not also an aspect of our debt which constitutes ministry to existing faith-systems, to whatever bearing we can sensitively have on how they respond to the times confronting them, to what they do about revision or mending of themselves? For what they become in such responding to new times, in such mending of their self-perception, will have vast consequences for human good, for religious liberation from bigotry and oppression, for social amelioration of poverties both of body and mind.

The great faith-systems, despite far reaching secularisation, are in massive possession of great mental territories and social situations, whether for good or ill. They are not to disappear from the total scene and Christian witness must relate to them, not only in the familiar reach to 'x' and 'y' in their private selves but to the set of mind and the evolution of ideology inside the wholes they are. This is not to say that the onus of 'disciple-making' is ever abandoned or that personal faith is not the prime requisite of soul-conversion in, and into, Christ.

Any such ministry to Islam in the whole can only be gentle, discrete and patient. For Islam has always been a very self-sufficient religion, little minded to think it needs listen outside itself, or bring a mind ready for theological perceptions not its own. Yet that it has urgent business with itself no intelligent Muslim can deny, nor deny that its obligations for such business with itself are massive in the world of chronic poverty and deprivation. Whatever aiding relationships from outside may be possible will turn on the ability to identify the Islamic reasons for them — reasons that are undoubtedly there in the core convictions of the Qur'an

order and of divine/sovereignty over-all, to which all are accountable. What the Gospel has in trust concerning 'God in Christ' still speaks tellingly to the people round 'God according to Islam' and that trust means patient interpretation of the one into the active mind of the other.