What Does J.N. Farquhar Have to Say about Islam?

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Abstract

John Nicol Farquhar was a Scottish missionary and orientalist, well-known even today for his ideas on fulfilment theology. Whereas Farquhar’s position on Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity is still widely discussed, few are aware of what he wrote about Islam. This is because it is assumed that his view of Islam was no different from his view of other religious traditions. This article discusses the question of whether Islam was merely part of Farquhar’s broader conception of religious traditions in their Christ-ward journey. My provisional answer to this question is that while it is true that for Farquhar, Islam was part of the broader context of religions, he also viewed Islam as being distinct from other religious traditions, both mainstream and marginal. His view was that Islam stood alongside Christianity as an ally, as a catalyst of reform in religions, and as such, Islam was not just an object of Christ-ward transformation. In this article, I focus on three of Farquhar’s major writings containing material on Islam, which may not be very well-known to readers and commentators today. It is aimed at theological students and teachers, particularly those interested in the theology of religions and dialogue with Islam, so that they can build on what they already know, and shape their thinking about how to relate to Islam and Muslims as partners, not merely as objects in God’s mission.

Keywords

1 Introduction

As a member of the Evangelical Union Church in Scotland, John Nicol Farquhar (1861–1929) came into contact with the Orientalists Max Müller (1823–1900) and Monier-Williams (1819–99) in Oxford (Singh 2021), and thus began his introduction to India. Although he did not attend the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, he remained in correspondence with its leaders, and this enabled him to make a significant contribution to the reports emerging from there. Farquhar’s influence became more widespread owing to his travels to England and USA, where he was associated with Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, which was becoming known for the study of Islam through the Duncan Black Macdonald Centre and the journal, The Moslem World, founded in 1911. His lectures at Hartford Seminary in 1913 focussed on the topic of his book on modern religious movements in India. Farquhar’s references to Islam in these lectures are particularly significant as they were delivered at Hartford Seminary.

Eric Sharpe (1933–2000), known for his survey of comparative religion as an academic discipline, speaks of Farquhar as being the ‘director,’ ‘inspiration’ and ‘conscience’ of ‘the Protestant missionary corps in India’. He suggests also that Farquhar was “the first Protestant missionary in India to base a missionary theology, not on Christian assumptions only” (Sharpe 2004:90–91; Anderson et al. 1994:290–6; Sharpe 1979:61–4). This characterisation of Farquhar as a missionary is only partially correct. Farquhar himself thought of his writings as being solidly academic, and in this sense could be placed alongside other scholars of his time. His works, however, were different from purely academic contributions in that his rigorous treatment of religious traditions was done in relation to Christianity.

There is another sense in which Farquhar was different from other Western scholars of his time. He acknowledged that while his main study involved Hinduism, his travels for lectures brought him in personal contact with men of almost every type of belief. This exposure enabled him to look beyond mainstream traditions to a host of marginal religious literature and little traditions of India, especially those that demonstrated signs of being a movement, including those that were transient. This choice to focus on the little traditions further distinguished him from most Western academics or Indologists of his time. In this sense, Fischer-Tine seems right in distinguishing Farquhar from both ‘spiritual Orientalism’ (advocated by the Theosophical Society) and ‘academic Orientalism’ (advocated by the Sanskrit departments of Western Universities). He places Farquhar rightly within a stream of Orientalism which distinguishes itself from polemics (Fischer-Tine 2020:659–683).
However, Farquhar’s aim in gaining first-hand exposure to Indian traditions, instead of merely engaging in armchair academics, was not to generate a new understanding of Indian traditions which few took the time or trouble to study in his time. His honestly expressed aim was to gain understanding, in order to highlight the positive results of contact, rather than the conflict caused by polemics. In this sense, Farquhar distinguished himself also from the missionary writers and theologians of his time.

The purpose of this article, however, is to highlight his view of Islam. Farquhar is well-known among Christian theologians of religion. However, although his position on Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity is still widely discussed today, few are aware of what he wrote about Islam. There is, nevertheless, a wider question to consider: Was Islam merely part of Farquhar’s broader conception of religious traditions? While it is true that Farquhar assigned Islam a place among other religious traditions, this view hides more than it reveals. Islam had a place in his developmental theology of religions, evidence of which he saw in the reform movements across religions. This paper aims to provide a more nuanced perspective by suggesting that Farquhar also saw Islam as being distinct from other religious traditions, whether mainstream or marginal. It proposes that Islam for him also stood alongside Christianity as a consanguineous source and catalyst of reforms of religious traditions, and hence an ally, not just an object. This emphasis is new in the scholarship on Farquhar.

Three of Farquhar’s major writings contain much relevant material on Islam, the details of which are possibly less known to his readers today. For this reason, I provide below a review of these sources, followed by a discussion highlighting the importance of Farquhar’s references to Islam. It is desirable that these works will find a fresh lease of life in our time and that theological students, particularly those interested in the theology of religions and dialogue with Islam, will uncover a facet of Farquhar’s works that has remained hidden from view before now.

2 Review of Three of Farquhar’s Writings

2.1 *The Crown of Hinduism*

*The Crown* (Farquhar 1913) contains 469 pages comprising an Introduction (1913:11–65) and eleven chapters. This work is often read and quoted by those familiar with Farquhar and partially contributes to the view that Islam as a religious tradition is encompassed within his theological assertion about religious traditions and their movements towards Christ. According to this view, there was nothing significantly different about Islam in Farquhar’s theological
notion of movements in religions towards Christ. Broadly speaking, it is true that in *The Crown* Farquhar was in search for a Christian missionary approach to all religions, and not just Hinduism as the title suggests. Islam was part of this conceptualisation in *The Crown*, and this is precisely why I would encourage readers to read his other works with Islam in view.

One of Farquhar’s first references to Islam, which he refers to as Muhammadanism, occurs in the context of his discussion about the ‘cleavage of opinion upon the missionary question’ (1913:17) – the issue of why missionaries should not persuade Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims to convert to Christianity. The reasons commonly proposed for not encouraging conversion were three-fold. First, the differences between religions were only superficial and of no consequence so that deep down, religions shared the same reality. Second, that religions differ deeply in doctrines and worship but these do not matter since religion is a practical thing and it enables people to seek the same God. Third, there are good people with joy in their religion who are guided by their own faith (1913:18–20).

It is clear that Farquhar found these to be absurd reasons for not actively engaging in mission between religions, including Islam. *The Crown* suggests that there are real resemblances between Christianity and Islam. Farquhar’s position on Islam appears similar to that of Louis Massignon (1883–1962) because both were deeply aware of the knowledge of shared narratives and role models across Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, as well as the evolutionary ideas current during their time. The evolutionary idea involving religion was conceptualised in terms of the picture of a ladder from pre-literary beliefs and practices to Christianity. To a reasonable ‘savage’ living according to his own light, the monotheistic vision, the law and the ethics of Islam, would have seemed to be an advance over his ‘primitive’ conception. If a polytheist came into contact with Christianity or Islam, idolatry would have appeared to him to be a folly. Consequently, even though Islam would have appeared to be closer to Christianity in evolutionary terms, to Farquhar it was still part of the assumed continuum of religious development.

The similarities between Christianity and Islam were undeniable but, for Farquhar, these did not overshadow the differences, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, which set Christianity apart as an evolved faith. Another example of similarity and difference comes from his view of the eschatological hope in Islam. Both Christianity and Islam subscribe to the idea of the discontinuation of the family, that: there will be no family in heaven in the sense that family is understood on earth. Nevertheless, he contrasts Islam where according to him, sexual enjoyment is made one of the chief attractions of heaven, with the Christian eschatological vision of life in heaven that is spiritual, or that there is no such life at all (1913:129).
Farquhar spoke of the caste system in his discussion of “the divine social order”. While the Buddhists and other unorthodox schools challenged the hegemony of Brahmanism, there was, according to him, no explicit condemnation of the caste system because it had not yet become rigid and harmful. Farquhar maintained that there had been no serious critique of the caste system prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity. Indian religions did not seriously advance any idea incompatible with caste until the arrival of Islam and Christianity. For Farquhar, caste was a natural outcome of the doctrine of *karma* and transmigration (1913:153–210). An Islamic critique of caste was made indirectly through the disappearance of all race difference in Islam which was “the necessary result of the conception of the infinite exaltation of Allah and of the littleness and weakness of man” (1913:191). Islam and Christianity share common ground here, but where they diverge was also significant for Farquhar. The “enslavement of unbelievers captured in war” can easily make sense in light of the “dogma, that believers are the object of Allah's high favour and unbelievers of his utter displeasure” (1913:191). He further held that “the Muslim doctrine that women are far inferior to men”, is responsible for the practice of “polygamy, free divorce and concubinism of Muhammadan lands. In other words, he saw a strong connection between belief and social organisation. The similarities between Christianity and Islam become less prominent in light of the examples of differences between them.

Elsewhere in *The Crown*, Farquhar returns to Islam in the context of a fuller discussion of idolatry, another point of contact that highlights the evidence of Islam's developmental advantage over other religious traditions (see 1913:297–350). As a scholar, however, he is also fair-minded in that he acknowledges indigenous traditions and the critique of idolatry emanating from within India itself. He gives an overview, for example, of ancient and modern criticisms of idolatry in some Tamil and Telugu literatures, especially in the works of the Maratha saint Namdeva (c.1270–1350). We know, however, that none of these evolved into strong and persistent movements until Islam arrived. Islamic iconoclasm manifested itself most severely in many examples of “the destruction of temples and images and the number of their priests” (1913: 332).

In *The Crown*, therefore, we can conclude that there are the seeds of a reformed vision of the relationship between Islam and Christianity, but these are overshadowed by Farquhar's critique of Islam and, in particular, Islam's extreme antipathy towards idolatry. Our understanding of Islam in Farquhar's thought would remain incomplete, however, without reference to his less quoted works. It is to these I now turn in support of my underlying argument stated in the introduction which is that Islam for Farquhar also stood alongside Christianity as a consanguineous source and catalyst of reforms of religious traditions, and hence an ally, not just an object of mission.
2.2 The Religious Literature of India

An Outline of the Religious Literature of India was published in 1920, as the fourth volume in the Religious Quest of India series co-edited by Farquhar and H.D. Griswold (Farquhar 1920). The work contains seven chapters and 361 pages. The editorial preface describes two impelling motives that inform the series, first, that each volume was written “in the sincere and sympathetic spirit of science”, that is, it was intended to be first and foremost an honest academic endeavour, and second, that they “seek to set each form of Indian religion by the side of Christianity in such a way that the relationship may stand out clear,” thus presenting Jesus Christ as their goal and starting point (1920: v–vi).

Any reader familiar with academic writings would have to agree that Farquhar is fairly detailed and thorough in his analysis of the sources and his writings are proper pieces of scholarship. The Religious Literature of India shows that Farquhar was not just a missionary or a missionary theologian (as characterised by Eric Sharpe and many others), but also a serious scholar. He is also quite distinct from other Western writers whose sole preoccupation was with the mainstream sources and traditions. It is evident that his scholarship was not an end in itself, but was in the service of God’s mission in Christ. To Farquhar, the academic examination of religions was not incompatible with the theology of religions where Christ is “the goal and the starting point.” Both scholarship and faith are necessary because “the second motive reinforces the first” (1920:iv). His fundamental position was that the religions of India at the time were on a quest and this “age-long quest of the Indian spirit” was finding in Christ “its goal and its new starting point” (1920:iv). A study of this quest needed solid scholarship.

Like all of Farquhar’s other works (except Modern Religious Movements in India), this book was inspired, he tells us, by “an overwhelming sense of personal need,” a need to understand Indian religious traditions in the broader context of the “chief Hindu sects or philosophies” (1920.ix). He believed that certain Indian texts and philosophies had been studied by scholars (Indologists), but as separate entities on their own, and not as part of the continuous religious history which included mainstream but also minor or little traditions. Farquhar was bothered by the barriers he saw as he sought to engage with the supposedly marginal sects or philosophies – not because of imperfections in them – but because these were, and had remained, imperfectly known despite a long history of their development.

In The Religious Literature of India, as in The Crown, references to Islam appear to be in passing but they are not, especially when seen in light of chapter 8 (1920:284–361). Even a cursory reading of this material would suggest, as scholars widely accept, that his approach towards Islam was not too
dissimilar from his approach to the other so-called Indian religions interconnected with the history of Hinduism. In Farquhar’s opinion, reforms within religions, including Islam, should rightly be seen as evidence of Christ “the light”: not just a light illuminating the Indian religions from within, but a light illuminating all religions. Islam would appear to be incorporated in this theological understanding but this, however, is only partially true.

One example of a historical reform in Hinduism was the bhakti movement. In speaking of the bhakti or devotional movement, Farquhar referred to the ancient Buddhist “university” of Vikramshila which was founded in the ninth century and abandoned in the early thirteenth century when it was attacked by Muḥammad ibn Bakhtiyār Khiljī (Khaljī) (d.1206). This Buddhist centre of learning, which attracted scholars from all over India, was already weakening owing to Hindu violence and criticism, and Islam came as the last and most effective weapon that “destroyed Buddhism [...] in the great conquest of the North just before AD 1200” (1920:272). Some may consider this to be a passing reference to Islam, but it is nevertheless significant since this martial version of Islam often excludes Sufism which shared traits with the bhakti cult, as for example in the hybridised cult of Kabir Das (1440–1518) which Farquhar wrote about (1920:284, 291m 323, 326–7). Islamic Sufism played a central role in Kabir’s spirituality (1920:331) which denounced idolatry and adopted a radical idea of monotheism (1920:332–333). Farquhar considered this movement to be evidence of Islam bringing about religious transformation in India as it contributed to bringing India’s religious traditions, however minor or marginal, closer to their goal in Christ. Islam was able to do this because it was an ally possessing actual and demonstrable continuities with Christianity, and not just ones that were conceptualised as part of Farquhar’s theological imagination.

Chapter 7 is devoted to a discussion of Muslim influence in India between 1370 and 1800. This is a substantial part of the book where Farquhar presents Islam as the main factor influencing changes in Hindu and Jain thinking and philosophies, but also, and most importantly, as providing the inspiration for reforming Indian sects. Over the centuries of Muslim interaction with Hinduism, and Islamic interaction with Indian religions, Islam had evolved a highly developed and ordered system of thought and devotional practice. This led to the emergence of movements such as Kabirpanth, referred to above, and Sikhism. These were just two of the twelve examples of reforms listed by Farquhar (1920:330–345). Both are living traditions in India even today, although Kabirpanth is to a lesser extent. These movements today exhibit socio-religious hybridity and are, like Islam, strictly monotheistic. For Farquhar, these reformed traditions were evidence of the movement of ‘the Indian spirit’ towards the ultimate goal, namely the Christ, and Islam as an ally,
was at the heart of them. Islam was part of the movements in Indian religions since it too was being transformed in the course of centuries of interaction with India. However, Islam was also the primary catalyst for the transformation in Indian traditions – in Farquhar’s words, ‘a new factor in the religion of India’ (emphasis mine) (1920:284).

Farquhar rightly acknowledged Islam’s importance in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in particular, even though Islamic ideas had not yet become widely established or diffused by this time. The diffusion of Islamic ideas happened through Sufism which led to a peaceful spread of Islam with results that, in Farquhar’s opinion, violent methods did not appear to have produced. Kabirpanth and Sikhism absorbed, in a more moderate way, “the stern monotheism of Islam and its hatred of idolatry” (1920:332). These movements became the more permanent indigenous voices of dissent within India. It is widely acknowledged that the Islamic critique of idolatry, as well as that of the nineteenth century Christian missionaries, led to the emergence of a number of other powerful theistic reform movements of which Brahma Sabha/Samaj (founded in 1828) and Arya Samaj (founded in 1875) are fine examples.

The gentle approach of Islam via Sufism, Farquhar argues, was effective in reaching the hearts of Indians, and making Islam and the worship of the one God more agreeable to them. Farquhar notes also the high-mindedness of Muslim Mughal rulers such as the philosopher-king Emperor Akbar, and later theologian-philosophers such as Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703–1762) and Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898). Akbar’s attempts at interfaith dialogue at his court may have had a political angle to them, but his aim was to make Islam fit into the Indian context, again under the influence of Sufism. It was during his reign that Hindu subjects had equal rights with Muslims, for the first time under Mughal rule, and some attained the highest posts in the military and civil services. Akbar’s din-e ilāhī (religion of One God) led the way to liberal religious policies, open dialogues on matters of faith and translations of Hindu works, as well as generating a sense of peace and well-being, although this was short-lived (1920:291). Therefore, Sufism was the means by which Islam truly penetrated the hearts and minds of Indians. Sufism influenced Kabir’s bani (devotional verses), the Guru Granth Sahib, (the holy book of Sikhism) and the fifteenth century Maratha bhakti (devotional poetry).

In conclusion, this section has provided evidence of Farquhar’s view of Islam playing a sustained role as a catalyst of reforms. As regards the significance and lasting effects of these reforms, for example Sikhism, the evidence points to Islam as standing head and shoulders above any other indigenous catalysts; Islam appears to be comparable only to the power, reach and eminence of Christianity.
2.3 Modern Religious Movements

Farquhar’s *Modern Religious Movements in India*, was the outcome of the eight Lamson lectures he delivered in 1913 at Hartford Theological Seminary, USA (Farquhar 1915). Given Hartford’s reputation for the study of Islam, it is not surprising to see distinctive references to Islam in this source. The book was published in 1915. The main text is 445 pages long and divided into seven chapters. Farquhar’s aim in looking at the many scattered and varied Indian religious movements was to arrange them in related groups, to each of which he devotes a chapter. Chapter two is about groups advocating serious reform of religion. Chapter three focuses on those whose reform is checked by defence of the old faith, a term he used to refer to supposed original religion such as the Ahmadiyya movement, established in Qadian by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, which Farquhar considered to be an example of reform in Islam. Chapter four considers those offering a full defence of the old religions, with religions in the plural referring to the Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic religions which were all simplistically incorporated within the more modern idea of a single religion called Hinduism. Chapter five of this book focuses on those aiming for religious nationalism, while chapter six focuses on “social reform and service”.

In chapter seven, Farquhar refers to the significance of the movements from a fulfilment perspective which interprets movements in religions as a sign of the work of Christ. Farquhar saw these movements “as varying expressions of a great religious upheaval” (1915: preface vii). Farquhar not only refers to Islam and Muslims in chapter seven, he also includes here at least two types of Muslim reform movements in order to build the broader picture of the movements and the place of Christianity relative to them. The first explicit section on Islam occurs in chapter two and is entitled ‘Muhammadan Reform’ (1915: 91–100). The second section on Islam appears in chapter three where he speaks of the Ahmadiyas of Qadian in South Asia (1915:137–147). In section five of chapter four he speaks of Muslims, whom he prefers to refer to as the Muhammadans (see 1915:347–351).

It is important to notice, however, that Farquhar makes a distinction here between “Indian religions” such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Hinduism and “foreign religions” (*mleccha*, meaning barbarian, unclean) such as Islam and Christianity (1915:134). It appears that in employing the notions of Indian and foreign, Farquhar was merely using categories that were already in use among scholars and administrators. It is my opinion, however, that this was his way of distinguishing Islam from the Indian religious traditions. We know from *Arya Samaj* sources that religious polemics were not a one-way street and that many viewed both Islam and Christianity as hegemonic religious traditions that were
foreign and not Indian, and so considered sources of an assault on Indian religions. Islam and Christianity provoked religions that were regarded as Indian to introduce social-religious reforms, and challenged indigenous theological ideas. Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), the founder of the *Arya Samaj*, actually saw himself as a Luther-like reformer of a Vedic community.

Dayananda and the *Arya Samaj* were part of a broader reforming current of which Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833) and his *Brahmo Sabha*, the precursor of *Brahmo Samaj*, were a part. However, in terms of scale, energy and longevity, *Arya Samaj* exceeded other Indian reform movements. However, unlike the *Brahmo Sabha/Samaj*, the theological ideas of *Arya Samaj*, and its mission to reform Indian society, emerged in reaction to Islam and Christianity. Farquhar rightly saw in Dayananda and his movement the agency by which Christianity and Islam risked being stamped out of India. His reaction to Dayananda was therefore unambiguously critical: “For extreme unfairness, for inability to state the position of opponents without caricature, and for general crudeness, these sections (of Dayananda’s *Satyartha Prakash*)\(^1\) can hardly be matched in the whole literature of religious controversy” (1915:113). Dayananda’s critique of Christianity and Islam was matched by an equally robust critique of the weaknesses of Hinduism, and it was this which evidently led to the founding of the *Arya Samaj*, the aims of which Farquhar summarized when he wrote, “Thus the programme included *reform* for indigenous religion and *extirpation* for foreign religion” (1915:112).

We have alluded above to Farquhar’s reference to reforms within Islam as in other Indian religious traditions. This cannot be used, however, as evidence in support of Islam’s lack of distinctives, or as an argument in support of Islam being a mere object of mission and not an ally of Christianity in reforming religious traditions of India. We know Farquhar also pointed to reform in Christianity, a situation when he considered that Christianity had experienced a little-known development of its own as a result of dialogue with Islam. This frequently overlooked development, mentioned in his book, was the Nazarene New Church which sprang up in the course of dialogue with the Ahmadiyya (1915:148–150).

This Church was initiated by E.J.S. White, a Christian government official who was impressed by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908). Farquhar wrote that in White’s opinion, Islam was a ‘perverted continuation of the Nazarene or Ebonite sect’, the immediate community of disciples of our Lord (1915:149). White saw parallels between this early sect and the early Islamic movement

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\(^1\) Dayananda’s *Satyartha Prakash* was his well-known polemical work against Christianity and Islam.
that consisted of the family of the Prophet. Farquhar states that White was keenly interested in Muhammadanism and that he found the Ahmadiyya version particularly attractive, partly because he believed that the Ahmadiyya had been suppressed in similar manner to the Ebionites, although not ‘crushed out of existence’ as the Ebionites possibly were (1915: 149). Despite his attraction to Ahmadiyya and its leader, White felt he could not follow him completely and so he established his own new church, in a similar manner to Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s creation of Brahmo Sabha/Samaj, a church which synthesised the purer elements of both Islam and Christianity in a Unitarian doctrine (1915:149). These purer elements included freedom for his members to read the Qur’an, the source of the Unitarian doctrine, to adhere to the law of Moses, the Gospel of Matthew and some parts of the New Testament, to go on pilgrimage to Nazareth, as well as the granting of freedom to women (1915:160). Some influential Muslim families from Kurnool, today in Telangana state, were sympathetic supporters of the movement. White tried to establish similar movements in other parts of South India, including in Madras, but he was unsuccessful and the movement finally ceased to exist (1915:150).

In the Brahmo Samaj I referred to above, God was worshipped, similar to Islam, as a Unitarian God. This was dissimilar to Christianity’s triune God where God is also the eternal Father. In causing the reform in Hinduism that led to the emergence of Brahmo Samaj’s idea of the One God, Islam had played a constructive role in Hinduism movement towards Chris. In this sense, Islam was Christianity’s ally. Islam was however also religion in need for reformation. Sufism or mysticism in Islam was significant in this light (e.g. see 1915: 148). We know that the Sufi-inspired South Asian movement such as the Mahdawiyya demonstrates evidence of the development of ideas about God similar to Christianity. God here is not some distant being but one who directly speaks and relates with humanity. The idea of logos has an echo in this tradition of Islam as Muhammad is not just viewed as a human prophet acting merely as a channel for a distant God, but rather as a God-like spiritual reality, arguably similar to the Christian idea of the Christ. Revelation is not just viewed as something that finally ends with Muhammad and the Qur’an but as something that continues through ‘the spirit or light of Muhammad’ for those following ‘the Muhammadan way’ (Singh 2002). As Islam was deemed to be the closest to Christianity in progressive terms, Farquhar’s reference to seeing God as the Father of men, or to seeing each person as a child of God, from which it follows that all men are brothers, would appear to be an oblique reference to Islam (1915:436). In this vision of the final transformation God was the Righteous One, as was taught by Jesus, a viewpoint that was also important for character building.
Evolutionary ideas applied to religions do not always coincide with reality. In Farquhar’s view, developments in other religions were not always unidirectional and uniform since they were often accompanied by continuous and steadily increasing inner decay. He credited Christianity with exposing both what was good and what was coarse, unclean and superstitious in the other. While he did not explicitly include Islam in this process, it is clear in the light of what I have said above that he considered Islam to be part of this. Some of the areas he highlighted, all of which he attributed to Christianity, and little or nothing explicitly to Islam, were as follows: a). reform movements recognise the significance of monotheism, “Christianity has made men feel that the only possible religion is monotheism” (1915:434). Given his frequent juxtaposition of Christianity with Islam, it appears reasonable to suppose that Islam was included here as an impulse for Indian religions to consider monotheism. b). Reforms exclude ‘polytheism, mythology, idolatry and man-worship’ (1915:435). c). The idea of God being righteous and just in Christianity, and also in Islam, has a profound influence as well (1915:137–138). d). A focus on the missionary nature of faith. e). A commitment to social reform (1915:442). f). The use of mission methods borrowed from Christianity (1915:442–445) and a desire for leaders to be like missionaries (1915:441–442).

In Farquhar’s opinion, some distinctive elements of Christianity were: a). The idea that “the worship of God must be spiritual” thus eliminating the need for sacrifices, ceremonial bathing, pilgrimages and self-torture. He considered that Islam, especially Sufism, was not far off this level (1915:438–439). b). The Christian doctrine of the person of Christ, which he saw also in a modified form in different movements including among Muhammadans and Ahmadiyyas (1915: 39–440).

3 Importance for the Theology of Religions

3.1 Religions, Islam, and Christianity

The immense breadth of religious traditions reviewed by Farquhar in the Religious Literature of India can easily give the impression to readers that this book is exclusively about Indian religious traditions. However, this is not an accurate conclusion. There are references throughout the book to Islam, which like Christianity is considered to be foreign and imperial, but such references are also found in a full chapter dedicated to the contact and influence of Islam and Muslims. These references show that Farquhar viewed Islam as both part of the broader religious traditions, and yet also different from them. This minor nuancing of our knowledge of Farquhar is significant. For example, one
of Farquhar’s aims was to demonstrate how Islam influenced Indian religious traditions and their transformations which, in his understanding, led them progressively Christ-ward. In this sense, Islam played the role of an ally or partner in catalysing reforms in religious traditions, in the same way as Christianity did. Islam was also right at the forefront of religions and, in the evolutionary sense, closer to Christianity than any other religion. Christ was already embedded in the beliefs and practices of Islam, in the belief in the one God, and the common narrative traditions of key characters and prophets. Islam, and indeed other traditions reformed through interaction with it, were allies of Christianity and, thus, distinguishable from other religious traditions.

Farquhar’s notion of continuities between religious traditions contributed to the reintroduction of a more level-headed approach to dialogue in South Asia. This was important in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when polemics and polemical debates were a common occurrence in India. Farquhar played an important role in this change of approach. Like Christianity, Islam played an important role in religious dialogue. The idea that Muslims played only a marginal role in promoting religious dialogue can certainly be challenged in the light of Farquhar’s work and its argument about the impact of Islam in South Asia. The liberal climate fostered by Islam, which also expanded in the context of imperial power before the time of the British, nurtured the evolution of new religious movements. These movements then served to bridge the perceived divide between religions and, as Farquhar argued, oriented them more closely towards Christ.

As noted above, Kabir Das played a significant role in bringing Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs to similar beliefs and practices, with many regarding him as a great mystic and religious reformer. He inspired a brand of devotion (bhakti) centred on one God which underlies reformed Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism alike (Scott 1992). Consequently, as Farquhar’s works amply demonstrate, the pre-British history of religious contact and exchange, in which Islam as a foreign religion played a role, places Islam alongside Christianity. We run the sad risk of forgetting this if we continue to hold on to the standard view of a one-sided version of Farquhar’s theology of religion where Christianity stands on its own in its exclusive relationship with all other religions.

Farquhar’s approach to Islam was refreshingly nuanced in comparison with nineteenth century polemical viewpoints. For example, he spoke of the role of the sword in the spread of Islam in India, but he balanced this by identifying other routes by which Islam gripped the hearts of ordinary Indians and thereby became a principal agent of transformation, with indigenisation through contact and exchange becoming a major means of the spread of Islam. Farquhar, however, did not fully address the question of the reasons for the growth of
Islamic influence in India and on India’s traditions over the centuries of its presence in the sub-continent. Clearly, this did not happen through the sword or by other theories that Eaton speaks of in his work (Eaton 1993). Eaton outlines four conventional theories of Islamization in India: immigration, sword, patronage, social liberation (1993: chapter one, section five). His critique shows that these theories do not fully explain mass contact and conversion over the centuries in India. Another of Eaton’s works, however, better explains conversion, and hence Islamic contact and exchange as a “very gradual process” which involved ‘accretion and reform’ (Eaton 2010). As Farquhar emphasised in his writings, one particular tradition of Islam, Sufism, played a central role, with the Sufis fulfilling a variety of functions in society (Eaton 2015). Besides the notion of the gradual process of conversion, the dynamic reality of Islam also spawned hybrid movements in India which impacted Hinduism.

Farquhar’s reference to the role played by the Emperor Akbar the Great (1556–1605) in promoting contact and exchange between Islam and other religions is significant as well. Akbar played a pivotal role in the promotion of interfaith relations in South Asia where there was one of the richest Muslim empires in the world. This impulse to relate and debate was inspired by the ‘soft-power’ of Sufism. Credit for facilitating the broader cross-cultural interactions between the English and various groups in South Asia between 1600–1857 has been given to the British East India Company (Pettigrew & Gopalan 2016). While this may seem surprising, the motivation for the overtures and revolutionary adaptations that made this possible was encouraged by the prevailing liberal atmosphere which was fostered by the devotional practice of Islam that many Mughals patronised. Jesuit encounters with the Mughals enabled them to change their perception of Islam. These missionaries then became the medium through which the Europeans, at the time the Portuguese, viewed Islam. The Jesuit position became less critical and less encumbered by a sense of superiority. As time passed, one sees a softer attitude emerging, and an increasing dilution of Jesuit criticism of the Mughal Islamic practices (Onekala 2015).

Farquhar offers a cogent classification of different types of reforms involving Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. He also offers his own explanation of the steady advance of the ancient faiths. Christianity was one of the major causes of socio-religious change but it was not alone in catalysing “acculturative” and “transitional”, to use Kenneth Jones’ terms, reforms in Hinduism, for example. The Arya Samaj, which Farquhar focussed on in some detail, was an example of transitional reforms (Jones 1994). The scholar in him was fairly guarded in claiming more for Christianity than was backed up by evidence. Farquhar rightly attributed the reforms he outlined to Christianity, but he also
acknowledged other possible impulses including Oriental research, Western science, and colonial input. Islam was a factor too and this was encompassed in his analysis of the reforms. Islam too experienced reforms, as did Hinduism but Farquhar saw Islam in a slightly different light when compared to Hinduism, as I have noted above. It was manifestly a monotheistic religion closely connected to Judaism and Christianity. There was the reality of its long presence in India. All this meant that it was impossible that it had not played a role alongside Christianity in encouraging religious reforms which resulted in a movement like the *Arya Samaj*.

Islam itself did not remain untouched. The contextualisation of Islam is often passed over in silence and there is even less discussion of Muslim efforts at adapting faith in its particular relationship with Christianity. Farquhar’s work draws our attention to the Ahmadiyya contextualisation which attempted to span the chasm between Islam and Christianity, and between Islam and Hinduism. One can see Islam’s ability to adapt in the case of the particular phenomenon of South Asian Sufism which has received attention in several works (Lee 2016 & Green 2009). *Darul ‘ulum* was one of the diverse schools of thought that reforms led to within Indian Islam (Geaves 2012). Deoband not only sought to wrest control of education from the colonial and missionary institutions, it also fostered a sense of Indian Islam and Indian Muslim identity. Their sense of a distinct identity was fostered by *da’wa* and *tabligh*, which were similar to the Christian missionary enterprise and involved a national and transnational Muslim mission work directed towards both insiders and outsiders (Kuiper 2017). It is clear, therefore, that Islam and Christianity have a lot in common, something which Farquhar the scholar was not prepared to ignore, and neither must we.

### 3.2 The Fulfilment Approach

Farquhar’s analysis did not envisage the setting aside of missions. In his view, Islam was included within the standard notion of religions in relation to Christianity. All religions, including Islam, lacked something that could only be replaced or fulfilled by Christianity.

What remained unacknowledged in this environment of reform across religions described by Farquhar, was the reality of an increasingly defensive stance among Christian missionaries. There was a growing realisation that these reforms were not naturally drawing religions to Christianity as their fulfilment. Reforms often had a lot to do with unintended factors generating a need for change, or a need for something such as monotheism, or for someone like the Christ they saw in Christianity or Islam, but these were not movements towards Christianity (Swamy 2012).
As noted above, the nineteenth century missionary approach was largely disparaging and oppositional. This approach focussed on the normative superiority of Christianity and was devoid of any appreciation of the insights into religions gained from the comparative study of religions or the science of religion. Farquhar wished missionaries to gain a deeper grasp of the academic approach to the study of religions, which he believed was better suited to enabling them to gain an unbiased, or less biased, understanding of other religions. His approach was, as noted before, not purely academic. This approach was a tool or a means for understanding other religions, so as to be able to relate Christianity and its missionary obligations to them. This particular aspect of his missionary approach was informed by the prevailing evolutionary thinking. Farquhar was a product of his time and so, unsurprisingly, he proposed a theoretical position that presented Christianity as the Crown of Hinduism. This approach was sympathetic in supposing that what is prior is not untrue; it is merely less formed or less developed. The task of the missionary academic was therefore to give a nudge to this evolutionary process.

Farquhar has been hailed as being part of a new type of missionary writer, alongside C.F. Andrews [1871–1940] and E. Stanley Jones [1884–1973] among others, who stood out in the context of a missionary enterprise which had largely adopted a negative approach to India and its heritage. Such an approach led to a similar response which was expressed through writings, street preaching, public debates and, more importantly, through indigenous and acculturative Indian reform movements. The ideas in Farquhar’s works reflected evolutionary thinking but affirmed also the universal witness of God, and took Indian texts, history and traditions seriously. This approach became known as fulfilment theology and it dominated the early twentieth century, later becoming less pronounced in Indian Christian theology. This approach to a theology of religions promoted a clearer and less prejudiced view of the other, one that was able to see continuities as well as discontinuities. Nevertheless, Farquhar did not write a book entitled the *Crown of Islam* as Islam was as much part of this story of fulfilment as Hinduism.

Farquhar’s ideas on fulfilment have echoes in many different theological writings, especially those emanating from India. A 2001 doctoral thesis by an Indian Christian theologian, Ivan Satyavarta, sought to throw new light on this approach by focussing on two Indian converts. Satyavarta argued that other religious traditions ‘can serve as “pedagogy” to Christ’ and a ‘verification of a Trinitarian scheme of progressive, differentiated and complementary divine revelation’ between Christianity and other religions. Satyavarta’s two case studies of the conversions of the Hindu thinker and convert, K.M. Banerjee (1813–1885) and Sikh convert to Christianity, Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889–c.1929), were
drawn from the Hindu and Sikh traditions (Satyavarta 2001). There were, however, examples of prominent Muslims who converted to Christianity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one of whom was ‘Imād-ud-dīn (Kamil 2019).

Concerning Christian-Muslim relations, there is a reflection of Farquhar’s evolutionary idea in the thinking of Louis Massignon (1883–1962), a Melkite Catholic who was a leading figure in Catholic-Muslim mutual understanding and referred to stages of revelation, with Christ completing this process in his revelation of Divine Love. His ideas involved a deep sense of sympathy with Islam as representing the stage of the natural religion of the Patriarchs (Gude 1996). His ideas also had parallels in the thinking of the British CMS missionary in Egypt, W.H.T. Gairdner (1873–1928). Although, some might see Farquhar’s approach as showing, at times, some affinity with the nineteenth century obsession with debate and apologetics (1910 & 1909), Farquhar’s approach on balance does appear to be fair-minded. The idea of fulfilment was subject to criticism early on by A.G. Hogg (1875–1954) who taught at the Madras Christian College and wrote *Karma and Redemption* (1904). Hogg was exceptional in his deep reflection during a period in the history of mission when missionaries were on the defensive owing to the reform movements in Hinduism (Sharpe 1982:65–69). Hogg was of the view that it was not fulfilment that Christianity offered, rather that Christians and Christianity were offering what the religious people were searching for. Mission was making a religious person feel the need for something only available in Christianity. The two positions are understandably wide apart as one focusses on continuities and the other on discontinuities.

Indian religions such as Buddhism and Brahminism had both conflicts and exchanges, similar to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, even though this would not be as obvious to most Western readers. Although there is some evidence of the contextualisation of Christianity, it was not as mainstream or as pronounced as the contextualisation of Islam through Sufism. Farquhar does not appear to have any awareness of the peculiar experiments of the Jesuit missionaries like Robert De Nobili (1577–1656), partly because, as with Eastern Syriac Christianity, this took place in Southern India and in a Catholic context, whereas Farquhar’s focus was on reformed Christianity. It took, therefore, some imagination on Farquhar’s part to construct an idea like fulfilment.² It

² Whilst India had a Jewish diaspora, his focus was not on demonstrating its relationship with Christianity or Islam. He seemed to assume a closer historical, narrative and theological connection between these religions. He may have been aware of Louis Massignon, although there is no evidence, who argued that these religions stemmed from the same source.
was brilliant in that it was only to be conceptually inferred, for example in seeing reforms as a movement of religions towards Christ, and was not expected to manifest itself in the concreteness of an actual conversion to Christianity. This is arguably the precursor of the ‘insider movement,’ or the notion of ‘secret believers’ that we are so familiar with today.

4 Conclusion

Any reader of Farquhar’s works cannot disregard their value as sources for understanding religions and religious movements in the nineteenth century. Farquhar’s aim in writing the books analysed in this article, was to study religions on their own terms. His writings can be clearly distinguished from the academic works Fischer-Tine calls “academic Orientalism” (2020). This is because they show his genuine engagement and first-hand exposure to Indian traditions and literature, especially those that would be deemed to be marginal or inconsequential. His works therefore reveal a lot more about ordinary Indians, their religious traditions, and the interpenetration of religious influences than the works of Indologists on the selected Sanskrit traditions. This distinguishes Farquhar from the other Western academics of his time.

However, Farquhar was not just a different kind of Western academic; he was also a serious Christian missionary theologian, and is better known as such. It is clear in the light of his beliefs about “hastening the consummation”, which was how he referred to the fulfilment of the Christological vision or goal towards which all religions were moving, that the motivation for his research was Christological. His writings, therefore, were fundamentally concerned with showing how religious traditions, especially when they experienced reforms, moved in the direction of Christ.

It has been the aim of this article to show that while in Farquhar’s theology of religions, Islam was one among other religious traditions moving towards consummation in Christ, this view does not do full justice to Farquhar’s position on Islam. Not only does Farquhar have a lot to say about Islam, a point which is often missed because of the all-encompassing traditional representation of Farquhar’s theology of religions, Farquhar thought somewhat differently about Islam than he did about other religious traditions. In his understanding, Islam belonged in a league of its own alongside Christianity and Judaism for several reasons. Firstly, despite the contextualisation in India of Islam as a body of religious tradition, it was more closely related to Judaeo-Christian tradition than Indian tradition. It was West Asian and not South Asian, even though it showed adaptations and reforms of its own. Secondly, in terms of its history and theological developments, it had concrete, and not imagined continuities
with Christianity. Thirdly, Islam was a source of reforms and transformative movements within Indian traditions, in the same way that Christianity was. In this sense it belonged on a plane similar to that of Christianity.

In proposing his evolutionary approach involving the idea of fulfilment, however, Farquhar brings all religions together, including Islam. They may not all be at the same stage of development or evolution, but they are all on the same Christ-ward trajectory. The significance of the evolutionary approach to the theology of religions can only be appreciated in light of the prevailing nineteenth century polemics and inter-religious competition which was in itself a product of contact with Islam and Christianity. Farquhar's approach charted a course that ran in the opposite direction to the polemics that characterised nineteenth century interfaith relations, as it pointed to continuities in religions which reforms within them were bringing to light. In his view, the continuities between Islam and Christianity were of a different order of consanguinity, although he conceptually aligned Islam alongside all religions to fit his evolutionary conception of fulfilment. Farquhar saw reforms as signs of a great movement towards the fulfilment of human aspirations in Christ, rather than in Christianity as a whole. This approach was criticized by scholars such as Hogg but was, and continues to be, relevant in contexts of hostility and opposition between religions, and especially in contexts of hostility between Islam and Christianity. Such a relational approach, as opposed to a polemical approach, to Islam, reminds one of Temple Gairdner and Louis Massignon, and thankfully such an approach is not absent today, even if it is marginalised.

References Cited


**Resumen**

John Nicol Farquhar fue un misionero y orientalista escocés, conocido hasta hoy por sus ideas sobre la teología del cumplimiento. Mientras que la posición de Farquhar sobre el hinduismo con respecto al cristianismo sigue siendo ampliamente discutida, pocos conocen lo que escribió sobre el islamismo. Esto se debe a que se supone que su concepción del islam no era diferente de su posición sobre otras tradiciones religiosas. Este artículo se pregunta si el islam era simplemente una parte de la concepción más amplia de Farquhar de las tradiciones religiosas en su camino hacia Cristo. Mi respuesta provisional es que, si bien es cierto que para Farquhar, el islam era parte del contexto más amplio de las religiones, también veía al islam como distinto de otras tradiciones religiosas, tanto principales como secundarias. Su punto de vista era que el islam estaba situado junto al cristianismo como un aliado, como un catalizador de la reforma en las religiones, y como tal, el islam no era sólo un objeto de transformación hacia Cristo. En este artículo, me centro en tres de los principales escritos de Farquhar que contienen material sobre el islam, que puede no ser muy conocidopor los lectores ni los comentaristas de hoy. Está dirigido a estudiantes y profesores de teología, particularmente aquellos interesados en la teología de las religiones y el diálogo con el islam, para que puedan construir sobre lo que conocen y moldear sus ideas sobre cómo relacionarse con el islam y los musulmanes como pares, y no simplemente como objetos en la misión de Dios.

**Zusammenfassung**

少有人知道他写的关于伊斯兰教的内容。这是因为人们假定他对伊斯兰教的看法与其他宗教传统的看法没有什么不同。本文讨论的问题是，伊斯兰教是否只是法夸尔更广泛的宗教传统概念走向基督之旅中的一部分。我对这个问题的临时回答是，虽然对于法夸尔来说，伊斯兰教确实是更广泛的宗教背景的一部分，但他也认为伊斯兰教与主流和边缘的其他宗教传统不同。他的观点是，伊斯兰教作为一个盟友和宗教改革的催化剂，与基督教并肩作战，因此，伊斯兰教不仅仅是向基督转化的对象。在这篇文章中，我将重点关注法夸尔的三部主要著作，其中包含有关伊斯兰教的材料，这些著作对于今天的读者和评论员来说可能并不为人所知。它面向神学生和教师，特别是那些对宗教神学和与伊斯兰教对话感兴趣的人，以致他们可以在已知的基础上再接再厉，并塑造他们关于如何与伊斯兰教和穆斯林为伙伴关系的思考，而不仅仅是将其作为上帝宣教的对象。