

Prophet Hood of Muhammad (ﷺ) and its Authenticity: views of a Christian, Kenneth Cragg

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Abstract:

The personality which has more discussed, applauded or disappaluded in the sequence of prophets, is the personality of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Among these writers Muslims and non-Muslims are included. In this context the Christians mostly poor press the personality of Prophet Muhammad. But with the passage of time, they have changed their views due to their access to the basic sources of Islam and with the changing of world scenario. Now the modern scholars write more positive and unbiased literature about the seerah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Among these intellectuals, Professor Kenneth Cragg, Bishop and a religious scholar is one, who has written many books. In these books he has written courageous and hopeful remarks about Prophet Muhammad. He wrote his books for Christian, with the aim to eliminate the polemic and negative thinking about Prophet Muhammad. In this paper these positive remarks is discussed.

Key words: Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Oreintalists, Kenneth Cragg, Changing perception, views , positive things.

In the Christian study of Islam the status and prestige of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) always remained big and controversial issues for Christian since the advent of Islam. Indeed, Muhammad (ﷺ) is one of those figures whose legend has grown so greatly that his historical person seems entirely overshadowed. For its consequence, Christian scholars today seem utterly at odds with one another that how we should regard him, while the vast majority of Christians are almost entirely ignorant about Muhammad, his life and teachings. At a time when a deeper understanding of the world's one billion Muslims has taken on a new urgency, it is no sensationalism, to maintain that it behooves every Christian today to encounter for himself the man regarded by Muslims as the final prophet of God, Chief of the Messengers.

On every platform of dialogue about Muslims-Christian relations, the status of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the pivotal point for further discussion. The Christians do not recognize it as it deserves and the Muslims can never compromise on it. Instead of respect or regard they do not acknowledge the genuineness of prophet hood of Muhammad (ﷺ). It is not the matter of today but its roots belong to the early history of Islam. Once the caliph Al-Mehdi asked Bishop Timothy about the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), He said:

“He walked in the path of the prophets.”(1)

This is the Christian mind at that time, they did not accept Muhammad's (ﷺ) Prophet hood status whole heartedly. There was negativity about Prophet

Muhammad (ﷺ) all around during the medieval period because of religious prejudice, enmity with Islam, due to its expansion in Christian's occupied areas. So their writers, religious persons, poets etc said about Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in the context of their own feelings, which they had no proof and their public accepted their fake views about Muhammad (ﷺ) because it was against Islam and its Prophet. The Christians always tried to prove that Muhammad (ﷺ) was not a true prophet of God but He was a liar, impostor and forth teller. They said that Muhammad (ﷺ) was not a prophet but a rejected Christian Bishop, who wrote Quran for political occupation. For this occupation He disguised himself in religious clothes. When He could not become a Bishop, He tried to take revenge from the Church and set a drama of religion. (2)

These kinds of views can be seen almost in the writing of every Christian scholar in the medieval period. Montgomery Watt said in this regard:

“None of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the west as Muhammad. Western writers have mostly been prone to believe the worst of Muhammad, and wherever an objectionable interpretation of an act seemed plausible, have tended to accept it as fact”. (3)

Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and sympathy and offers religious freedom to everyone and more lenient towards Christianity. Islam also announced that Jesus was a genuine prophet of God(4), who was born from pious virgin Maryam(5), then Why the Christian executed such distorted remarks about Muhammad. Norman Daniel highlighted the hidden agenda behind these remarks.

“That the hidden agenda behind these polemical works on Muhammad was to prove that Muhammad was a mere human with no divine intervention in his life and, hence, could not be a Prophet.(6)

W. Cantwell Smith writes the similar kind of words:

“It is no wonder that Muhammad more than of the world’s religious leaders has had a “poor press” in the west, and that Islam is the least appreciated there of any of the world’s outside faith. Until Karl Marx and the rise of Communism the prophet organized and launched the only serious challenge to western civilization that it has faced in the whole history. (7)

The question is why the westerners utter so poor words about Muhammad (ﷺ). The reason is clear, Islam is only religion who strongly condemned the Christianity of Paul. The Christianity had no answer which the Islam raises about Jesus, Mary and their adopted creeds like incarnation, Son ship of Jesus, Atonement and Cross etc. So in response they tried to blame Islam, his prophet and other branches of Islamic studies. The poets, novelists dramatists of medieval period created a imagination picture of prophet and their people accepted it without any proof and hesitation. These fake and imaginatory stories are alive today in one or other shape.

Sir Hamilton Gibb admits that it is impossible to avoid being subjecting in the matter of Muhammad.

“There are almost as many theories about Muhammad as there are biographers. He has for example been portrayed as an epileptic, as a social agitator, as a proto-Mormon. All such extreme subjective views are generally repudiated by the main body of scholars. (8)

S.P.Scott illuminates the picture of the Holy prophet as drawn by the western scholars. He said:

“As a result of inherited prejudices there principles of every religion always appear heterodox, false and absurd to sincere believers in other forms of faith. Of all the theological dogmas, none have suffered more from the effects of ignorance and injustice than those of Islamism. The name of its founder has for thirteen centuries been a synonym of impostor. His motives have been impugned, and his sincerity denied. His character has been branded with every vice which degraded or afflicted mankind. The greatest absurdities, the grossest inhumanity, have been attributed to his teachings”. (9)

These polemic attitudes remained alive through centuries. In the past, the Christians never tried to know the reality. In the era of European revival, and in the colonial period, they had direct access to the Islamic literature. They translated it into European languages then their views and attitudes began to change about Islam. In the second half of the 19th century, these kinds of vague images began to change to more objective and positive ones. They not only rejected and criticized the previous views but also appreciated the prophet hood and teaching of Muhammad (ﷺ).some scholars openly criticized and rejected those fake stories which were spread during the medieval period about Quran and Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

The personality which is more discussed in the world than any other for last fifteen centuries is the personality of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Instead of Muslim scholars a lion share belongs to non-Muslim scholars. Their work mostly consists of prejudiced background, but some of them accepted the truth and appreciated the

teachings and work of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Among these soft minded scholars are, Carlyle, Montgomery Watt, Hans Kung, Karen Armstrong and Kenneth Cragg etc.

In this article the positive work of Kenneth Cragg about the personality and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is discussed. Kenneth Cragg was a well – known Christian scholar, professor and a clergy man. He wrote more than fifty books and hundreds of articles. His books include the Holy Quran, Seerah of the Prophet and Muslim-Christian relations. He wrote many books on Seerah of the Holy prophet like, Muhammad and the Christian, Muhammad in the Quran, The Weight in the word, Returning to the Mount Hira, The Call of the Minaret and The House of Islam.

Cragg has positive remarks about Prophet Muhammad. First of all, Cragg announced criteria to research and analyze a religion and it's Prophet. He said that every religion has its own environment, history and system of faiths. So every religion must be analyzed according to its own beliefs and not be compared with the historical perspective of other religions. Macca is not a Galilee and Medina is not Jerusalem, Muhammad cannot be compared with Buddha and Jesus. There is no similarity between 7th and first century AD. So they must be discussed according to their own present and past. Furthermore he said:

“Therefore it is wisdom to leave the several faiths to their own world views, their historical matrix and their characteristic mood and mind. One should not look to their contemporary societies for any common reaction to the present world. Their future must be conceded to be as separate as their pasts”.(10)

Cragg criticized those western scholars who take the past today which they have no authenticity. In his book “Muhammad and the Christian” he advised the Christians to leave behind the past and accept Muhammad (ﷺ) as the prophet of the Quran.

“We can properly take Muhammad as the prophet of the Quran, and with many old cavils and polemics thus out of the way, locate all critical acknowledgements within the actualities of the book. (11)

Cragg said to the Christian scholars that when we want to see Muhammad we should deeply see Quran because the whole life of Muhammad is Quran, in other words Muhammad in Quran and Quran in Muhammad. This is the primary ignorance of Christianity that when they write about Muhammad, they hear the call of their heart not the voice of Quran. According to Cragg this method of Christianity is totally wrong. We should deal Muhammad according to the Quran. In this sense He said:

“The ultimate area of Christian response, given an honest reckoning with all the fore going, will be the content of the Quran itself. Indeed the question of a Christian acknowledgement of Muhammad resolves itself into that of a Christian response to the Islamic Scripture. It is safe to say that Muhammad himself would not have it otherwise. (12)

He further said:

“Muhammad in the Quran could equally well be the Quran in Muhammad. The inter fusion could be stated either way. The sequences of the book belong with those of the Seerah, or prophet career”. (13)

Cragg strongly criticized those Christian scholars who used lethal language for Prophet Muhammad. According to Cragg:

“It has sometimes and sadly been ventured by outsiders to Islam whose ends in view were calumny and false accusation. Muhammad was an adventurer, a cheater, an impostor, a self-pretentious dupe-or duper. His deliverances were a self-serving alibi for the overweening pride of ambition. Such hostile malign animadversions, totally repudiated here, do not begin to measure the genuine issues. They ride roughshod over Muslim integrity and disqualify themselves from the real onus of a task they distort and despise. We only begin to explore the soul in the seerah, when we recognize both the reality of Islamic faith-keeping and of the life story that gave it being”. (14)

Cragg himself was a Christian and clergy man. He had devoted his life for church and Christianity. At the same time, he was moderate minded person. He raised many question about the teaching and mission of the Holy prophet Muhammad(ﷺ) like that Muhammad was only the prophet of Quran, prophet for Arab only, difference between Makkah and Madina period, a question mark on the illiteracy of the prophet, the use of power against his opponents but never used ill and substandard language. He mostly used the word “prophet” for Muhammad (ﷺ), Prophet of Islam, prophet of Arab, prophet of Quran and Prophet Muhammad. He also requested other Christian scholars’ to beware of showing polemical views about Muhammad, because this kind of negativity will always keep them in ignorance and is also against the teaching of Christ. Cragg elaborates this feeling as:

“Long Christian miscreance about Muhammad evaded the truly exploratory as a right Christian theology would have required it and reveilled, instead in willful denigration around items of lesser relevance to faith and greater fader to ill-will. It paid little attention to time and place, being happy to think itself scandalized by what it found.(15)

Cragg accepted that Muhammad was a prophet but not as Jesus Christ because being a Christian Cragg believed on atonement and the Son ship of Jesus but at the same time he accepted that Muhammad was a monotheist, who created a community of faith in the light of revelation. Cragg also rejected the Christians, views that he (Muhammad) stole the teaching of Christianity and he was affected by Church. Cragg said:

“It was not, by and large, Christianity calculated to present Muhammad with a fully authentic picture of Christ and Church. Some of the urgent issues of early Church history docetism and monophysitism are mirrored in the Quranic account of Jesus as non-crucified prophet Messiah. But it gave to Muhammad, under what precise circumstances may never be known, the most fundamental concepts in his vocation and in subsequent Islam: a sure monotheism and a prophetic mission in which a divine relationship of revelation, through Scripture, created a community of faith”. (16)

Cragg said that the Prophet Muhammad preached the oneness of God.

“The essence of Muhammad’s message was not the enunciation of the existence, but of the sole existence, of Allah and of the criminal folly of all other worship”. (17)

Cragg said Muhammad terminated the worship of Idols and idolatry was removed and the oneness of God was implemented throughout the Arab.

“It is incontestable that his supreme purpose was to terminate idolatry and establish the sole worship of God, acknowledged as God alone. Islam was the faith about God, to end gods. It was the revelation to finalize revelations. (18)

Cragg compares the personality of Muhammad and Jesus and accepts that both were sincere in their missions, both faced hardship, showed courage and patience and remained firm in every situation. Cragg said:

“The situations of Jesus in Jerusalem and Muhammad in Mecca are in some measure analogous. Both faced an opposition of religious truth based on prestige and pride. Both were rejected as upstairs, disruptive of the status quo. The Pharisees and the Quraish though otherwise highly contrasted - are thus far alike”. (19)

Cragg accepted that all the prophets of God faced hardship and showed tolerance to their opponents. They never took revenge. All the Biblical prophets and Muhammad have the same story of prophet hood.

“Hostility to Messengers is a dominant and permanent theme in all prophetic stories. Muhammad is one with Hebraic antecedents, in the certainty and pain of his experience of calumny, ridicule and harsh rejection”. (20)

After this comparison, he concluded that the human beings need both Muhammad and Christ, Muhammad as preacher and Christ as savior.

“In this sense the world that needs Muhammad needs the Christ, and needs them for these contrasted reasons. Thus, needing the Christ, it needs Christianity in so far as Christians can truly serve him in his utmost relevance”. (21)

Cragg accepted the universality of Muhammad and Quran .The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad are for the whole world and his teachings cannot be confined within His followers.

“As a mercy to the worlds, Muhammad and the Quran cannot well be confined within Islam, nor their significance withheld from those who do not assent to its beliefs”. (22)

Cragg elaborates the common ground between Muhammad and the Biblical prophets. The main theme of his books is to point out the common grounds and similarities between Islam and Christianity. He proclaimed the better relationship between the both communities because both are the biggest religions of the world. The peace of the world depends on their good relations. That is why in the West Cragg is known as Ambassador of Muslim Christian relations. Cragg said:

“One common feature, is however , in almost every case, the sense of “burden” leads to the recruiting of “disciples” something of what Aaron was to Moses, Baruch may have been to Jeremiah. Muhammad had his companions, while Isa in the Quran has Ansar, disciples who are his helpers unto God. (23)

Dr shabbier Akhtar commented on Kenneth Cragg in these words:

“Despite of its avowed Christian axioms, Crag’s critique is largely didactic and objective, not polemical or propagandist. Yet I wish to argue that Cragg occasionally lapses from his own Demanding, standards of sincerity and objectivity”. (25)

Dr Attaullah Siddique appreciated Kenneth Cragg as Islamist in these words:

“Kenneth Cragg holds that what Islam is, what Muslims hold to be, After Zwemer Cragg eloquent interpretation is like a breath of fresh air Core to his interpretive effort is the notion of retrieval. He means by it to enable Christians and Muslims Rise above historic misunderstandings between the two faiths and Make sense of Christian beliefs, applying Quranic and Islamic ideas to provide Islamic reasons for being Christian”. (25)

Conclusion:

From the above references, it is concluded that Kenneth Cragg was a moderate Christian scholar. He tried to give due respect to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). At any stage he never degraded or disregards the Holy Prophet. It is correct that he used the terms, Prophet of the Quran, the Prophet of Arabs, for Muhammad (ﷺ), which is not totally correct according to the Muslims beliefs, because Muhammad (ﷺ) was not only the prophet of the Quran or Arab but He was Rasul Allah (prophet for all) and his prophet hood and teachings are not only for Arab world but also for the whole humanity. But most admirably, Cragg speaks candidly and even imploringly to the reader, for he has clearly put his heart and soul into this project. Ultimately Cragg teaches that, while Christians may not completely reconcile themselves with the figure of Muhammad, they will be moved by this encounter to reexamine their own relationship with the God who moved Muhammad so powerfully. He confirmed that the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) cannot be confined within Muslims but they are for all. Muhammad (ﷺ) preached oneness of God, He created a faithful community. In this study the hopeful innovation is that the ice of prejudices of centuries is melting. The polemical thinking is vanishing and a sun of new hope is rising.

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