

Kenneth Cragg on Muslim-Christian Relations

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Abstract

This era of Muslim-Christian relationship is deeply indebted to such scholars who, from their Christian point of view, have given a fresh air and deeper understanding of Islam. They have advocated the element of love and sympathy in their research. They have illuminated the hidden values and profound meaning of Islamic religion. It means that there is a space for an apology for apologetic thinkers. Kenneth Cragg was one among these soft minded scholars who addressed the Christian world to retake the Muslim world in a way which is acceptable for Muslims. Kenneth Cragg was an Evangelical upbringing Bishop, Missionary and professor. His field of research was Semitic religions but his main focus was Muslim-Christian relations. He wrote more than sixty books and mostly is on Islam, in which he mostly discussed those matters which are similar in Islam and Christianity, especially according to the Quran and Gospel. Both the sides accused him, Christian said: that he was giving priority to Quran over New Testament and the Muslim scholars blamed him that he was Christianizing Islam, but he looked sincere to create harmony between Islam and Christianity. In this paper we critically analyze his views about Muslim -Christian relationship.

Key words: Kenneth Cragg, parameters, Christianity and Islam, relationship

Introduction

All the religions preach peace, cooperation and harmony among human beings. All the religions Semitic or non Semitic have many similarities and

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no religion teach discrimination with the followers of other religion. All the revealed religions are based on morality and respect to each other. No religion discriminates others on the basis of creed, race or colour.

In the Quran God said

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ.²

(O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.)

Islam is the claimer of peace. Islam's claim of peace is immense. Islam claims that "A Muslim is the brother of other Muslim"³Islam also considers the whole mankind a single group.⁴But there are more values in common with the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), including faith, morality, the Sunnah of the Prophets, and all of them are equally associated with the Prophet Abraham (A.S.).

Therefore, finding closeness and harmony among these religions is natural because they are well aware of the basic concept of prophet hood and its accessories. That is why when the Quran addresses the polytheists, it has a different style.⁵ Of course, words and arguments are different, but when the Qur'an addresses Ahle Kitab (Jews and Christian), its style changes drastically. Most of the commentary of the Qur'an to them is a reminder and the acceptance of the oneness of God, which is common among them.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ.⁶

(Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

From its inception, Islam teaches global social harmony. Islam is a universal religion. The Almighty Allah knew that there would come a time when a mixed society would exist even though Islam did not move out of the Arab region until the end of Prophet's life. By that time almost every society was either racial or linguistic. Or a religious one - but today's society is a multi-ethnic society. There is no country in the world where People of different colours, races, languages and religions are not living together in one place.

If this multi-faceted society is viewed by faith, then it appears that the two types of people - Muslim and Christian - are at the top. That is why it is very important for world peace to have harmony between them. Dialogue, discussions, seminars, conferences and councils on a variety of global platforms are being held periodically due to their importance. But the gulf is so large in terms of Muslim-Christian relations that it is very difficult at all to approach it. The existence revealed religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam have many similarities because; they belong to one source, which is God. They have the common system of faith and morality. Their basic teachings are same. But religiously Judaism never accepted or compromised with Islam and Christianity. On the other hand it is historically proved that Muslims and Christians are living together for many centuries. In early days of Islam, Christianity was more lenient, courteous and affectionate to Islam than Judaism.

Quran also appreciated the Christian behaviour and dealing with Islam and it is also applicable today if both sides show patience in their daily life.

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَ لَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرَىٰ ذَلِكَ بَأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِيَّيْنَ وَ رُهْبَانًا وَ أَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ -7

(Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are

Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud.)

But at the same time there is a long history of conflict and misconception between Muslims and Christians and some intentionally stimulated it. The conflictual situation of modern era is also the continuity of the past. But we must acknowledge that there is much difference between yesterday and today, and tomorrow will be more different than today. So, in the Christian camps there are three groups. The first group considers Islam to be a completely false religion which has nothing to do with God and His revelation. In this regard, they do not give any importance to the Muslim reservations. The second group consists of those scholars who do not have the same attitude about Islam as the first group, but they abandon the way of Muslim-Christian relations, unless Muslims recognize their beliefs. The third group is comprised of those scholars who believe that they should continue to strive for a better relationship with Muslims. For this purpose they try to create harmony and talk about the similarities.

In this context the scholars have started to conduct seminars and discussion to create religious harmony between Muslim and Christian. Kenneth Cragg was one and the most prominent figure among these scholars. He was an ambassador of Muslim -Christian closeness and relationship.

According to Kenneth Cragg if we want to live in peace and tranquility and want to save our future we must overcome this conflictual situation and negative mutual interpretation. Past has become past, we must think about our future.

“If we mean to live in this world, it has to be said that
cross reference theology

Is the only one that there is.”⁸

One of the major reasons for Cragg's like in the research world is his views on minimizing the differences between Muslims and Christians and not only preventing the widening gap between them but It has to be

reduced to some extent so that they can express good thoughts and feelings about each other while maintaining their beliefs, which will not only create peace between them but also help to improve international peace. He realized the importance of Muslim-Christian relationship during his stay in the Middle East.⁹ He did not let this feeling die, and started his literal efforts in early 1950s with his Ph.D. dissertation entitled as:

"Islam in the 20th century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relation of the Christian Mission to its problems."¹⁰

In 1956 when he wrote his first book "The Call of the Minaret" the purpose of this book according to Cragg was to overcome those obstacles which past has created between them.

"The Call of the Minaret is the epitome of Muslim belief and action. To seek in it the clue to Islam, and from that clue to learn the form and dimension of a Christian relationship to what it tells, is the purpose of this book."¹¹

These words show that its purpose was to persuade Christians to listen to the voice of the Muzinans (Prayer caller) and to re-examine their relationship with the Mosques. In one of his essay about Muslim Christian relations Cragg said that Quran stressed on the unity of humanity and there was no other community in this world but one and all the human beings belonged to one community and one God. In Surah 7:172, the haunting question, "Am I not your Lord?" is understood in the context of the whole of humanity as if simultaneously present in a single contemporary audience. All "the progeny of the sons of Adam" from al-azal to al-abad, through the whole stretch of time, are so addressed. For us now, in a generation that can be linked up by radio as a single audience, how much more far-reaching and urgent is that question now: A lastu

birabbikum? "Am I not your Lord?" comes to all. This is divine omnipotence awaiting our consent.¹²

When all the human beings belong to one God then why are we building walls around each other? In religious perspective Muslims and Christians are very close. Cragg elaborates this closeness of relationship in these words.

"Among the great faiths of the world Islam is unique in its relationship to Christianity."¹³

Cragg believed that today's world is the world of cooperation and harmony. Individuality has no place. Muslims and Christian cannot survive without each other. Cragg uses this approach bilaterally to urge Muslims and Christians to understand each other and come close by eliminating conflicts by mutual understanding, so that past mistakes can be resolved. He also invites them to understand Islam and Islamic practices and try to reconcile them as the two religions have many things in common. In this regard, Cragg counts Islam as Biblical, Abraham, and Semitic, and shows that a particular type of nexus is found in both religions. Both the communities are based on the same system of belief.

"Their basic commitment to belief in, the significance of the world, the oneness and personality of God, the fact of revelation and the moral accountability of man in and beyond this life."¹⁴

The shared status of mutual union shows that today's world is a world of mutual interdependence and that today human beings are living in a world of partnership and unity so their individuality and individual lives have no significance and in this proximity Islam and Christianity are very close because of their similarity in most of the cases. The importance of interfaith dialogue is greatly enhanced. We should respect each other. To make this situation ideal and comprehensive Inter-religious dialogue is the only method to pave the way of future generation and our existence.

"From inter-religion as one of the facts of our existence, we turn to think of it as a conscious of relationship."¹⁵

To pave the way of dialogue Cragg stresses upon both the sides to forget wounds of the past and start a new journey - a journey of cooperation and relationship. Our dialogue will be fruitful if we leave behind the injuries of the past.

"If we are to meet, we must come out of Adamant Square and leave Cavil Row behind."¹⁶

In this way their relationship will be more solid and powerful. To achieve this goal, Kenneth Cragg warns the western that they must give up polemic and prejudice method which they have adopted from the past. Cragg also emphasizes that non-Muslims should also keep in mind that it is important for a scholar to peep inside before writing on Islam, and for this purpose one must mix up with Muslims. It is important to live together and be freed mentally, so that a better religious relationship can be laid. While studying Islam Christians have to keep in mind that the feelings and emotions of Muslims have to be taken into account so that their religious feelings are not affected by their study. They must be avoiding those methods which they had adopted in the past. Cragg has strongly criticized western researchers for not only committing great irresponsibility in the matter of Islam and the Quran, but also to overrule all sorts of morality. They did not realize what their unwise attitude would be to the Muslims, so before writing on Islam they had to keep in mind that their writings should not offend the sentiments of the Muslims. They showed much irresponsibility in writing and speaking about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Islam.

"There have been pursuits of western scholarship unhappily careless of these courtesies. For all their admirable erudition and equipment of criticism, they have nevertheless deserved their own cause of failing to

reckon with the human responsibilities of the clash of culture and of thought in which they were involved."¹⁷

The main reason of conflict between Islam and Christianity is the personality of Prophet Muhammad. The western scholars intentionally ill treated Muhammad. So Muslims can never compromise on the prophet hood of Muhammad (PBUH). In his book "The Weight in the Word", Cragg clearly shows the similarities between the Prophet Muhammad and the Biblical (Israeli) prophets. He mentions the common issues which are essential for prophecy and he reiterates that these similarities are mentioned in the Qur'an and Bible as well. These similarities include the unity of God, the condemnation of idolatry, the nature of revelation and its burden, and the message of God to the people through revelation. According to Cragg, all the prophets needed companions in this regard, who were supportive to the prophets in spreading the message of God to the people. In addition, Cragg also mentions the personality of the Prophet and the difficulties they faced during their preaching period. In describing all these things, Cragg mentions synonyms rather than differences. All the prophets of God had faced hardships; Muhammad also faced hardships like Biblical Prophets.

"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 this experience of calumny, ridicule and harsh rejection."¹⁸

So the life of Muhammad is not different from other Prophets of Allah. Cragg said He also faced hardships in Makkah as Jesus in Jerusalem.

"Christian theology is, therefore, not on alien ground in the territory of Muhammad's Mecca. It occupies it in the contrasted idiom of Jesus."¹⁹

The burden of revelation and its intensity were equal to all prophets. So Muhammad has also bearded the same intensity of burden of weight of the words as other Prophets of God faced.

"Given that prophet hood Biblical and Quranic, admit of a discerning comparative study, ... Quranic verse, seeing that the Hebraic "burden "holds the same three in one."²⁰

According to Cragg without religious harmony we cannot build good relations. For religious harmony it is very important for Muslims and Christians to study Quran and Bible without prejudices. One of the main things which Muslim should do is to study the Christians as in the New Testament and the Christians must also consider the terms and conditions of Muslims to understand the Qur'an and Islam. In this way he wants to build a bridge between them that may keep the two-way traffic going and both understand each other, respect each other's beliefs and socially and internationally live a peaceful life, because religiously Muslims and Christians face similar situations and problems, and today's problems also have common. So they should try to settle them together. Along with religious connection there is also another connection, which is the connection of humanity. This is common in Quran and Bible.

"Through all their run, as integral to the sense of the universal the new dimension of the person, the same of men as men, not of Jews as Jews, of Greek as Greek, this effective discovery of personality, individual yet social."²¹

Cragg makes it very clear that the common cause of our mutual distinction is the distance between the mosque and the church. Cragg states that Christians should also take into account the aspects that Muslims have about Jesus and Mary and the respect which Muslims deliver to both of them.

"These tensions between us should not be allowed to prevent a lively Christian sense of the significance of the Islamic acknowledgement of Jesus as Prophet, sign and servant, and of the Virgin Mary, His mother, and of his

disciples are helpers unto God.... Those vistas between Jerusalem and Mecca must be seen in both directions."²²

We should not forget the devotion that Muslims have for Jesus and Mary. These differences can be removed if we accept God power according to Quran and Bible. In this situation it is important that we leave a different perspective and adopt a common framework which Cragg called "Divine Order". Under it, accept the position of Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the Qur'an states and accepts the Christian status as Jesus.

"This, in turn, means wisely appreciating the mediating conception of "divine agency"...without compromising our loyalties, assuming that these are ready to relate. It may help us into the language world of secularity."²³

Islam furthermore describes the greatness and excellence of Jesus. Prophecy is similar in mission to mission. All the Prophets are innocent and sacred. Their lineage is superior and free from every defect. Therefore, the Quran denies all the accusations that were made by the Jews to Mary.²⁴ The purity of Mary is described in a very clear way.²⁵ The Holy Quran describes her virtue on all women.²⁶ Prophet Muhammad and Jesus were both God's servant and messengers. Therefore, Islam gives much more holiness to Jesus than what Cragg describes, and the Qur'an describes Jesus' personality, teachings, and mission in a clearer and more holistic way than the Gospel.

It is a common rule that a man loves much the faith which he follows. So it is the duty of every person to respect the faith and belief of other's. In this regard Cragg fully respected Islam and Muslims.

"A faith that lives by the unity of God, the efficacy of his Prophet, the sovereignty of His law...Mission on behalf of God and for His due recognition is the central meaning of Islam both as a concept and a community."²⁷

Cragg accepts that there is no difference between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These are revealed religions and belong to one source and root.

"Islam stands squarely in the same tradition as the Jewish and Christian faiths, witnessing to a monotheism that refuses all compromise with plural deities... It was only by a firm negation of these superstitions of paganism that Muhammad could bring his great positive affirmation to the divine unity."²⁸

Cragg says if Muslims and Christians give up all prejudices and follow the teachings of their own religious books, then all these conflicts can be eliminated because the teachings of all the divine religions are uniform and the basic teachings of all the divine books are substantial. There is a degree of similarity and this can bring the two religions closer together. Cragg further said that in this triangle of revealed religions Islam and Christianity are the closest,

"Islam and Christianity deal fundamentally with the same things...prophecy, worship, prayers, mercy, law Scriptures, patriarchs, God's sign in nature, creation and sin, all these are religious categories having to do with the Divine relation to the human."²⁹

Religious institutions and religious people are fundamental factors in the formation of any society and the mind-building of individuals. When the voices of peace and security and religious tolerance will rise from Mosques, Temples, Gurdwaras and Churches etc., the general public will also respond to this voice.

"Christians are ambassadors" in a person-to-person relationship. They are the Debtors to their fellow mortals ...This is the prerequisite of being underrated and the first element in their response to the importance of the Minaret.

While preachers and missionaries need this attitude more and more to communicate with people in a way that does not create hatred. The most important thing for them is that they are knowledgeable to be well-versed, not only should they have full knowledge of their own faith and religion, but they must also be fully aware of the beliefs and religious literature of others. Cragg seems to convince us that the cause of the rift and gulf in Muslim-Christian relations is largely due to the fact that both groups do not go deep into their primary source of study, both the Gospels and the Quran communicate with their souls; disagreements could be eliminated if they were made accordingly.

Therefore, he tells Christian missionaries that if they study the Gospel deeply, they can answer the questions raised by the Qur'an on Jesus and they can overcome the obstacles that the Qur'an has. In this way their mutual animosity will decrease. For the sake of a better relationship, Cragg emphasizes that Muslims should change their thinking about Jesus, as well as mandate that Christians be aware of Christianity in the Muslim world, and that of Muslims and Christians can establish better personal and social relationships. The purpose of God's creation of the universe is to promote mutual relations only when these relationships are improved and then the purpose of their creation will be fulfilled.³¹ Cragg tries to convince Christianity that Islam is based on the well-being of this relationship. Therefore, we Christians should recognize the importance of the Qur'an in the eyes of Muslims, and also the respect of Prophet Mohammed, who mainstay in the life of Muslims. Because the authenticity of the teaching of the Quran depends on the messenger to whom the message is being sent.

“We find that the message of the Quran is bound up with the faithfulness of the messenger in proclaiming it. He is veritably Prophet. To that degree the message becomes the messenger.”³²

Cragg also invites Christians to say what they hear or read about Islam in the past is not just poisoning Islam on their own, but if they want to understand Islam correctly, then they get out of the books and dictionaries and go to Mosques, they will know the origin of Islam and it will help them to understand Muslims.

"To enter into Islam, it is better to go to the Mosque than to reach for the dictionary,...Truly to know Muslims in their faith we must somehow linger in the precincts of their prayers, kindle to the accents of their Scriptures, the Quran, and feel the pulse of the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast."³³

Cragg also believes that in order to understand a belief, one must look at the past as well as study the past in order to understand Islam.

"There is the recovery of one past, the appropriate, and the retrieval of the other past, the inappropriate. Both emotions are powerful present factors."³⁴

In the light of these views, we can say that Cragg is truly serious about Muslim-Christian relations. He has spent his entire life striving for this; he has encouraged both preachers and practitioners on both sides to bring flexibility and tolerance to their attitudes. While Islam also teaches its believers that preachers should maintain wisdom, good advice and goodwill for goodwill.³⁵ And abstain from things that make the speaker feel bad.

Referring to the beliefs of Muslim-Christian relations, Cragg says that the beliefs that are shared by both nations are the focus of Christianity.

"Christian faith though traditionally, in many of its central items, inadmissible for Muslims, is vitally concerned with the same underlying themes that are at the heart of Islam."³⁶

He further said in this regard:

"That Christianity itself is vitally concerned with the same understanding lying themes that are at heart of Islam...It begins with what Christians have in common with Muslims."³⁷

Islam and Christianity are primarily concerned with the same things and behave almost as well as dealing with them, such as messengers, worship, prayers, mercy, law, inspirational books, and imams, the signs of God in the universe, creation and imagination.

"God end gods, the revelation to end revelations...these are the the inclusive common convictions of Islam and Christianity."³⁸

Both believe in one and sovereign God. Cragg uses this approach bilaterally to urge Muslims to understand Christianity, and the Christians to understand Islam. He also invites them to understand Islam and Islamic practices and try to reconcile with them as the two religions share many things in common. In this regard, Cragg counts Islam as Biblical, Abrahamic, and Semitic, and shows that a particular type of nexus is found in both religions.

"Inasmuch as both Christian and Muslim faiths believe in one supreme sovereign Creator God, they are obviously referring."³⁹

Cragg sometimes seems so sincere in Muslim-Christian relations that he uses every tactic that can brings these two big faiths together.

"By their basic commitment to belief in the significance of the world, the oneness and personality of God, the fact of revelation and the moral accountability of man in and beyond this life, these two faiths have close affinities."⁴⁰

Conclusion:

From the above discussion we can conclude these parameters on the basis of Cragg's views and all these parameters are also mentioned in the Holy Quran.

1-We all are belonging to one root. Relation of humanity is the most important element among us. Above all the religious differences and divisions, this relationship is very strong and unbreakable. So as a human being we must respect each other. The Holy Quran also declared that whole humanity is one nation.

{Humanity was a single community; then God sent the prophets, as deliverers of good news and warners. And with them He sent down the Scripture, with the truth, to judge between people regarding their differences. And only those who were given it differed about it – after clear proofs came to them – out of envy among themselves. Then God guided those who believed to the truth they had disputed, in accordance with His will. God guides whom He wills to a straight path}.⁴¹

2- Christianity and Islam have the same basic system of faith and morality. We must show unity on these similarities. Quran also invites us on these similarities:

{ Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to terms common between us and you: that we worship none but God, and that we associate nothing with Him, and that none of us takes others as lords besides God." And if they refuse, say, "be witness that we are Submitters.}"⁴²

3. Both belong to the common system of prophet hood. The chain of Prophets is common among them. Muslims believe in all the Biblical Prophets. A Muslim cannot be a Muslim if he negates anyone of them.

{ Say, "We believe in God, and in what was revealed to us; and in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Patriarchs; and in what was given to Moses, and Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We do not differentiate between any of them. And to Him, we submit.}"⁴³

4- We should respect the religious figures; especially the western scholars must review their method and style of writing about Prophet Muhammad. Muslims give a lot of honour and respect to Jesus and Mary. Islam furthermore describes the greatness and excellence of Jesus. Prophecy is similar in mission to mission. All the Prophets are innocent. They are superior and free from every defect. Therefore, the Quran denies all the accusations that were made by the Jews to Mary. The purity of Mary is described in a very clear way. Quran describes her virtue on all women.

5-The Mosques and Churches must preach tolerance, patience and harmony. Most of our differences can be eliminated in this way. We should also give respect to all the religious places.

6. A meaningful inter-religious dialogue is the best way to create harmony and to reduce the present tension between Islam and Christianity. Both sides should show tolerance and humbleness and avoid conflictual situation. In this regards The Holy Quran advised the Muslims in these words:

{And do not debate with the People of the Scripture except in the best manner possible, except those among them who do wrong. And say, "we believe in what was revealed to us, and in what was revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we are submitters.}⁴⁴

7-Our differences can be eliminated or minimized if the Christians follow the teaching of Gospel and the Muslims act according to the Quran.

These parameters of Kenneth Cragg are a serious effort for Muslim-Christian relationship. There is nothing against Islam and Christianity in these parameters. These parameters are also applicable in present situation.

There is no doubt that Islam and Christianity are monotheistic religions. So if we want to improve Muslim-Christian relations, then we will have to close polemic thinking about each other's religion, respect for the sacred

beings, one has to stop from the synagogue of the other's places of worship, sacred books and religious personalities.

So far as Islam is concerned, Muslims have never done such a thing which is to insult the people of other faiths. Islam prefers relations with the "people of the Book" more than other religions, allowing its followers to eat and marry with Ahle e Kitab, which is a good example of the social aspect of Islam. Cragg's views are very encouraging. It is best to get out of the current contemporary situation so that both nations (Muslims and Christians), in their own camps, review the present mistakes and shortcomings and make sincere efforts to remove them. So the best solution is to change the way Muslims behave, and to make the Christian their own, in order to end the existing frustrations.

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