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Kenneth Cragg's Assertion on the Notion of Incarnation in the Qur'ān: A Critical Appraisal

Akilu Aliyu Muhammad*
Noor Amali Mohd Daud**

Abstract

Although Islam and Christianity differ respectively on the doctrine of Incarnation, i.e. God the Son or the *Logos* (Word), became flesh, whereby Islam rejects it completely, and Christianity affirms it uncompromisingly, one of the celebrated orientalist, Albert Kenneth Cragg, claims to have discovered its affinities in the Qur'anic text. His main point of this argument is Qur'anic text (33.56), where he asserts that the word "*taṣliyah*" shares the same notion with the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. Therefore, this article attempts to critically analyze and evaluate this claim. In the course of carrying out this task, historical approach has been adopted in deliberation on historical and intellectual backgrounds of Cragg. Textual as well as analytical approaches have been adopted in exploring his views on the existence of Incarnation in the Islamic text. Evaluative and comparative approaches have been adopted in assessing his views from the Islamic view point. The article concludes that Cragg's attempt to discover the doctrine of Incarnation in the Qur'an is groundless, and that there is no, in any way, divinity in the personality of Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

Keywords: Kenneth Cragg, *taṣliyah*, incarnation, Christianity, Islam

Introduction

The doctrine of Incarnation is the cornerstone of Christianity which if removed from its theological body, it will automatically collapse. The essence of the doctrine elucidates that Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity took human nature when he was conceived by his mother, the Virgin Mary, through the Holy Spirit. However, as eternally begotten Son of God, as Christianity holds, he also took another form of divine nature. These two natures which are united in his person, qualified him to be fully God on one hand, and fully man on the other. Both are integral and also

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do operate together. If one is removed, the other one is automatically removed, and the Christian faith is knocked down.

Based on the Christian understandings on the doctrine of Incarnation, Albert Kenneth Cragg (1913-2012), a distinguished Anglican Bishop and a British missionary in the area of Islam, tried to co-relate and understand Islamic doctrine within the framework of Christian belief. Cragg's intention was to facilitate both Christian and Muslim to understand each other, expecting that, through such an avenue will promote a peaceful coexistence between the followers of two religions. Moreover, Christian may able to appreciate their reasons for being Christian by fully engaging with Muslim.¹ Reverend Ray Skinner in his obituary remark states: "I am sure many will want to give thanks to God for his (Kenneth Cragg) great love for and understanding of the world of Islam, and for his encouragement to so many of us in introducing Muslim friends to our crucified and risen Lord Jesus"².

However, espousing such an understanding of others through the lens of one's self ,create many problems. One of Cragg's efforts is to co-relate Muslim's idea of Divine salutation of the Prophet with the doctrine of Incarnation. Cragg concludes that the word "*taşliyah*" shares the same notion with the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. Aims of this article are to critically examine the existence of the doctrine of Incarnation in the Qur'an as claimed by Cragg. The research conducted is qualitative in nature. The researchers proposed to use content analysis and adopt the principal approaches, namely historical, textual, analytical, evaluative and comparative. Historical approach has been adopted in deliberation on historical and intellectual backgrounds of Cragg. Textual as well as analytical approaches have been adopted in exploring his views on the existence of Incarnation in the Islamic text. Evaluative and comparative approaches have been adopted in assessing his views from the Islamic viewpoint.

Cragg's And His Intellectual Background

Albert Kenneth Cragg was born in Blackpool, Lancashire, in North West England on 8th March 1913. His Christian life began in Christ Church Blackpool, a "nursery of evangelical loyalty" devoted to the Book of Common Prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel. He won a scholarship to study at Blackpool Grammar School. He, later on, got the opportunity to read Modern History at Jesus College, Oxford. Cragg was conferred

¹ Cragg, Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (London & New York : Maryknoll and Darton Longman, 1984), p. 122-139

² Reverend Ray Skinner, *Anglican Mainstream*, 2012,

<http://anglicanmainstream.org/bishop-kenneth-cragg-goes-to-glory/>

Bachelor and Master's degrees from Oxford University from 1934 to 1938. He went on to read theology at Tyndale Hall Bristol (Trinity College) and was appointed Deacon in 1936 and Priest in 1937. He served as a Curate in Chester Diocese from 1936 to 1939.¹

In 1939, his lifelong association with the Middle East began with his service under the British Syrian Mission in Lebanon. Cragg was entrusted to teach at the American University in Beirut. While ministering to the English-speaking community there from 1939 to 1947 he devoted himself to learn Arabic language.² After the World War II, Cragg returned to Oxford and wrote his doctoral thesis on "*Islam in the Twentieth Century: The Relevance of Christian Theology and the Relationship of Christian Mission to Its Problems*". Cragg was conferred Doctor of Philosophy in 1951³. The same year he flew to United States to teach Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Hartford Theological Seminary, Connecticut. He edited the internationally recognized quarterly *The Muslim World* until 1956.⁴ His book *The Call of The Minaret* published in 1956 was based on lectures on interfaith studies he delivered in America. This book marked the beginning of his voluminous writings on Islam and its teachings.

After five years of involvement in teaching and research, Cragg went back to Middle East in the late 1950s to begin his long association with St. Georges Cathedral at Jerusalem. His main responsibilities were to teach and develop educational courses in the diocese. During that period, he began to travel throughout the region to encourage Christians on understanding the importance of engagement with Muslims. From 1967 to 1970 he taught at the University of Ibadan Nigeria. From there he moved on to Cairo where he was appointed Assistant Bishop of Jerusalem residing in Cairo⁵.

Cragg's wide experience in Christian Muslim engagement enabled him to publish voluminous works on Islamic studies. Issues related to the *Qur'ān* and Muhammad (p.b.u.h) are the recurrent themes of his writings. Cragg considered the *Qur'ān* as one of the very significant sources from which the Islamic teachings could be deduced, and the religion itself could be understood. His interest in studying the *Qur'ān* led him to the

¹ Watson, John H., *Listening to Islam: With Thomas Merton, Sayyid Qutb, Kenneth Cragg and Ziauddin Sardar: Praise, Reason and Reflection* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press 2005), p. 49.

² Watson, John H., *Listening to Islam*, p. 49.

³ Watson, John H., *Listening to Islam*, p. 49.

⁴ Anderson, Gerard H., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Wm.B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), p. 50.

⁵ Anderson, Gerard H., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, p. 50.

publication of *The Event of the Qur'an* in 1971, which was followed by *The Mind of the Qur'an* in 1973. His book *Islam from within* published in 1979 was dedicated to facilitate Christians in understanding Islam which was followed by *Readings in the Qur'an* in 1988. He also considered the doctrine of Prophethood in Islam as one of the crucial issues in the Muslim-Christian relations. Two books were dedicated in this area viz. *Muhammad and the Christian* published in 1984, in which he discussed the Prophethood of Muhammad SAW.

Cragg's retirement from full-time ministry in 1982 gave him an ample opportunity of reading, writing, teaching and traveling until his death on 13th November, 2012. This period was considered the most fertile part of his life. Cragg's earnest devotion to the academic pursuits and engagements in inter-faith dialogues are really significant factors which contributed to the development of his scholarship. However, engagement with the *Qur'an* and understanding of the Islamic teachings, as Cragg asserts, will not only make Christians to be aware of Islam, but will also enable them to find within it the reasons for being Christians¹.

Cragg authored about sixty books, out of which, *The Call of the Minaret* published in 1956, and *Sandals at the Mosque* published in 1959 were respectively considered as the first published books which raised his flag in the field of Muslim-Christian relations. Discussing Cragg's intellectual achievements without referring to these books is vain. The books, for the Christians, are superb and very important which introduced them to the Muslim world, while, for Muslims, are among the most controversial books in which many untenable appraisals and criticisms were made against Islam.

Cragg's Assertion on *Taşliyah* (A Divine Salutation): An Analysis

The doctrine of Incarnation is known to be one of the fundamental beliefs in Christianity. This doctrine is one of the main areas in which Muslims and Christians differ. It is quite clear that Muslims are in total disagreement with Christians on this point, but despite this fact, Cragg contended that the doctrine is there in the Qur'anic text. The focal point of his argument is the Qur'anic verse (33.56) where Allah says: "Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe! Call for (Divine) blessings on him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation". Based on this verse he declared that, the word *taşliyah* is the same with the New Testament cry: "this is My son, My Beloved..." He asserted that, the word *taşliyah* is

¹ Tebbe, James A., *Kenneth Cragg in Perspective: A Comparison with Temple Gairdner and Wilfred Cantwell Smith* International Bulletin of Misionary Research, 2002), p. 16.

evidently a kindred and similar term to Incarnation. The word reflected a shared Muslim and Christian theme, and that the only difference is in the living translation.

Cragg argued that the verb *yuṣallūn* mentioned in the foregoing verse is normally used for ritual prayer to God. But it also implies the activity of God Himself, which, however, the same verb the believers were commanded to emulate. This may come to mean, further, an inner divine pleasure in which the will of God rejoices in the messenger, or it may mean the harmony and relationship between the will and fulfillment in the divine counsel. Therefore, in that way, he asserted, *taṣliyah* only gives devotional expression to the form of the testimony of faith or *shahādah* itself. This kind of act links between the Lordship and Prophethood. Cragg furthermore argued that, some people may limit the interpretation of the verb (*yuṣallūn*) to the direct context of *Qur'ān*, chapter 33, which deals with Muhammad's exculpation and acquittal from slanders which were directed against his domestic life, and in this sense *taṣliyah* simply means the divine approval of Muhammad's uprightness, as something which believers, too, are commanded to recognize and admit. But *taṣliyah* in Cragg's viewpoint goes beyond such that simple interpretation. It is the ground of relationship to God...it is the way of placing oneself reciprocally within the divine favor.¹

Cragg's argument mentioned above is just an introduction to his main mission of importing the doctrine of Incarnation into the realm of Islamic themes. In the first place, the argument seems to be scholarly in nature, but as he went further, he changed his approach and ended up in Christianizing Islam where he ventured to equate the *persona* of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) with that of Jesus in the doctrine of Incarnation. He asserted that we uncovered something which we thought to be at congruity between Islam and Christianity about the relationship between God and man within the *Qur'ān* of the Muslims, and it was only claimed to be in the person of Muhammad not in the person of Jesus Christ, that is *taṣliyah* which has the same meaning with Incarnation. Cragg (1984) explicitly said,

We discover that, something of what we thought to be quite at odds *between* Islam and Christianity about God with man is there *within* Islam, only it belongs to the person of Muḥammad , not to the person of Jesus. Purely doctrinal contrast between Christian faith in the incarnate world and the Islamic doctrine of Prophethood as the final plainly do not fit the situation as *taṣliyah* reveals it. To exclude what

¹ Tebbe, James A., *Kenneth Cragg in Perspective*, p. 16.

New Testament holds about the person of Jesus is not to escape the question to which it is the Christian answer.¹

Nonetheless, Cragg contended that *taṣliyah* (which means divine Incarnation in his modern theological reflection) has been decided and enjoined by God Himself. In his view, God's order to offer salutation to the person of Muhammad and his involvement in this activity brought Christians closer to what they have believed to be the importance of Jesus in both his person and his ministry. However, the only difference, in Cragg's view, is in the place of Prophethood and revelation.

The sort of 'associatianism' of the human with the divine which *taṣliyah* involves is justified here by a decision about God himself. He allows, even welcomes with transcendence to generate rather than a love which can only rightly be God's in utter dissociation from all else. The implications here for Christian thinking are plain. They bring us close to what we have always believed to be the significance of Jesus in his person and his ministry only that the idiom is different by the difference between Mecca/Medina and Galilee/Jerusalem. But there can be no doubt that, the Muhammad of the Islamic mysticism and devotion indicates how close in that area, Islam comes to the instincts, though not to the content, of Christian theology.²

The discussion above shows the analogical argument which Cragg used in his attempt to correlate Jesus with Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in the doctrine of Incarnation. Moreover, all the foregoing discussions were premises through which he could reach his conclusion and final result. In the following discourse, he explicitly arrived at his conclusion by saying;

And just as, for Christians, the faith of incarnation means expression of the perfectly human (Incarnation being a doctrine about man as well as about God), so also does the *taṣliyah*. Muhammad is celebrated as the perfection of humanity, not merely in the sense of moral example... but in the metaphysical sense as the divine 'idea' immanent in the whole creation.³

The question here is why Cragg took this direction? Why he tried to correlate the *persona* of Prophet Muḥammad SAW and that of Jesus in

¹ Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p. 57-58.

² Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p. 58.

³ Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p.58.

this controversial belief? In answering these questions, Cragg asserted that his exploration of the doctrine of Incarnation in Islam as it is in Christianity would help both Muslims and Christians to achieve mutual theological understandings. Moreover, it will make Muslims to find out from their own idioms the approval which explains and warrants Christian beliefs in Jesus. He illustrates;

There must be careful note of the fact that, Islam even in spite of itself, find place for categories of relationship between divine ends and human means, between the eternal and the historical unlike and yet akin to those that are at the heart of Christian experience in Jesus as the Christ. That may spell hope for the mutual theology we seek. It may help Christians to see beyond the exigencies of propositional controversy to the inward experience. It may enable Muslims to discover within themselves the sanctions which explain and warrant the New Testament faith in Jesus as the point and place of divine self-giving to reveal and to redeem. Both the developments would greatly serve the future of relationship by including what was arid and polemical fostering a more relevant openness of spirit.¹

To sum up, Cragg contended that, both should celebrate each other because they share the same theological notions in respect of persons of Prophet Muḥammad SAW and Jesus Christ. He, nonetheless, affirmed his claim of existent similarity between both the prophets in the doctrine of Incarnation, and the only difference is in translation. He concludes;

In respect of both, there is hope that, the very celebration of Muhammad may suggest a clue to the New Testament recognition of Jesus. For what but *taṣliyah*, a divine salutation is the familiar New Testament Cry: ‘This is My son, My Beloved hear him? Sonship, there, is the unity of wills, the harmony of ends, the point of the divine satisfaction in the human means of its translation into fact. *taṣliyah*, evidently, is a kindred term, a Muslim and a Christian theme. Only the living translation differs.²

This conclusion unequivocally shows Cragg’s attempt to Christianize Islam through his modern (rational) approach. His argument

¹ Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p. 65.

² Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p. 65.

over the Qur'ān 33:56 lacked any support or concrete basis in both orthodox evangelical tradition and Islamic teachings. It is a groundless argument which needs to be critically evaluated. It is because of such an unfounded argument that some Christian scholars accused him for Christianizing Islam.

Evaluation of Cragg's Assertion on *Taşliyah*

The previous analysis has shown that Cragg's focal point was on Arabic word *taşliyah* which he derived from 'şallā. However, the word *taşliyah* is a presumable infinitive of 'şallā'. But, Arabs do not make such derivation¹, instead, they use *şalāh* in its place because; the popular usage of *taşliyah* in Arabic language is for 'ihrāq' which means burning, as mentioned in the Qur'ān (56:94) "wa taşliyatu jahim"². In fact, there is no place in the Qur'ān or Tradition of the Prophet SAW where the word *taşliyah* in person of Prophet Muḥammad SAW was used. Hence, the usage of this word itself to mean the divine salutation to Prophet Muḥammad SAW is questionable because the Muslim scholars do not use it, and it is not in line with the Islamic terms which are used for Prophet Muḥammad SAW. On this account, the usage of the word *taşliyah* in this area of the research will be eschewed and replaced by *şalāh* unless when it is necessary or when referring to Cragg's views.

Furthermore, many Muslim scholars hold the opinion that the usage of the word *şalāh* for both Allah and His creatures does not mean His involvement in the same activity. The word is the same, but the meaning is different. This rule is applicable not only in the issue of *taşliyah*, but also in all attributes and actions of Allah. Allah says, "There is nothing like Him, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (Qur'ān, 42:11). This means that Allah is Unique the Self-Sufficient Master who has neither equal nor comparable. Allah's *şalāh* on Prophet Muḥammad SAW denotes His praise on him before the angels, while the *şalāh* of the angels is their supplication. This opinion has been reported by Imām al-Bukhārī from Abū al-'Aliyah³. Al-Tirmidhī said, "This was narrated from Sufyān al-Thaurī and other scholars,

¹ Ibn Manzūr, Muhammad Ibn Mukrim, *Lisān al-'Arab* ,(Beirut: Dār Sadir, 1979), vol 14, p. 464.

² Ibn 'Āsyur, Muhammad Tāhir, *Al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tūnusiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984, vol 11, p. 319.

³ Ibn Hajar, Shihābuddīn Abul Fadl Ahmad Ibn 'Alī Ibn Muhammad, *Fath al-Bārī Sharḥ Sahīh al Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1379H), vol 13, p. 337.

who said, “The *ṣalāh* of the Lord is mercy, and the *ṣalāh* of the angels is their seeking forgiveness”¹.

Al-Ṭabarī in his *tafsīr* commented on the verse by saying, “This may mean that verily Allah is having mercy upon His messenger and that His angels pray and seek forgiveness for him. This is because *ṣalāh* on the Prophet (p.b.u.h) from other than Allah in Arabic language means prayer”. To illustrate, Al-Ṭabarī holds the opinion that *ṣalāh* in which Allah involves is different from that of angels and believers which, evidently, confirms that there is no relationship between Allah’s *ṣalāh* and that of His creatures. For Allah’s *ṣalāh* means His mercy which he sends upon His faithful servant and messenger, Muḥammad SAW, while for His creatures means their prayers for him. When this verse was revealed, the companions asked the Prophet (p.b.u.h) on how to say *ṣalāh* upon him, and the Prophet (p.b.u.h) then taught them many different types of *ṣalāh*.²

In this regard, al-Bukhārī recorded in his *tafsīr* of this verse that Ka’ab Ibn Ujrah said, “O messenger of Allah! We have knowledge of how to say *salām* upon you, so how about *ṣalāh*? He said, “Say: “O Allah! send your *ṣalāh* upon Muḥammad and upon the family of Muḥammad, as You sent Your *ṣalāh* upon the family of Abraham, verily You are the Most Praiseworthy, Most Glorious. O Allah! Send Your blessings upon Muḥammad and upon the family of Muḥammad, as You sent Your blessings upon the family of Abraham, verily You are the Most Praiseworthy, the Most Glorious”.³

Al-Qurtubī (1384), while commenting on this verse in his *tafsīr*, says, “Allah’s *ṣalāh* is His Mercy and blessings upon His servant, and angels’ *ṣalāh* is their prayer and seeking forgiveness for believers as Allah says, “...And they seek forgiveness for those who believe...”(*Qur’ān*, 40:7)⁴ In another place in his *tafsīr* he also says, “Allah has honored the life and death of His messenger with this verse... Allah’s *ṣalāh* is His mercy and blessings, angels’ *ṣalāh* is prayer and seeking forgiveness and *Ummah*’s *ṣalāh* is prayer and veneration for his status.

Al-Baghawī (1997) in his *tafsīr* also says, “Allah’s *ṣalāh* in this verse is (His) mercy, angels’ *ṣalāh* is seeking forgiveness and believers’ *ṣalāh* is

¹ Al-Mubārakfūrī, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahīm, *Tuhfat al-Ahwadhī Bi Sharh Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī*(Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1382H), vol 2, p. 21.

² Al-Ṭabarī, Muhammad Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Ta’wil al-Qur’ān* (Muassasah al-Risālah, 2000), vol 20, p. 320.

³ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī Sharh Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, vol. 13, p. 337.

⁴ Al-Qurtubī, Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Abi al-Barr Ibn Farh, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d), vol. 14, p.198.

prayer". In another place he quoted Ibn Abbas saying that, "[This verse] means that verily Allah is having mercy upon His Prophet (p.b.u.h) and that the angels are seeking forgiveness for him¹". Al-Shawkānī (1414) in his *tafsīr* writes that Ibn Mardawayh reported from Ibn 'Abbās who says, "Verily Allah's *ṣalāh* upon Prophet (p.b.u.h) is forgiveness, (because) Allah does not involve in the act of *ṣalāh*, but He forgives, and the *ṣalāh* for human beings upon the Prophet (p.b.u.h) is seeking forgiveness for him". Ibn 'Abbās' statement means that if *ṣalāh* is considered in its literal meaning, verily, Allah does not involve in such an act, but *ṣalāh* with regard to Allah means forgiveness². Such a differentiation between Allah's *ṣalāh* and His creatures' is what Cragg failed to understand or he understood but his vested interest deterred him from considering the true meaning and blatantly claimed the 'associationism' of the human and the divine in this activity through a vague argument over the literal meaning of this word.

Further, Al-Rāzī (1420) in his *tafsīr* says, "It is known that Allah's *ṣalāh* is different from angels', and angels' is different from human beings', but with this, Allah used the same word for each of them". What Al-Rāzī wants to point out here is that sharing the same word does not mean sharing the same meaning. The involvement of Allah in *ṣalāh* upon the Prophet (p.b.u.h) with His creatures does not mean that Allah carries out the same activity with them, because Allah's activity differs from His creatures'³.

However, even the verb '*yusallūn*' which Cragg asserted that it involves Allah and his angels, some scholars hold the opinion that there is an omitted verb which is originally attached to Allah so as to differentiate between His *ṣalāh* and that of His angels, and the assumption reads as: '*Inna Allāh yuṣalli wa malāikatahū yuṣallūn*'⁴. This means that the pronoun in the verb '*yusallūn*' is for angels only. Nonetheless, even if it is assumed that Allah involves in the verb '*yusallūn*', it does not mean that He carries out the same activity with the angels. It is a kind of statement in which God involves His angels to show their honour and respect in His sight, not in the sense that they do the same thing.⁵

¹ Al-Baghawī, Husayn Ibn Mas'ūd, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzil fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Basyāir al-Islāmiyyah, 1997), vol.1, p. 63.

² Al-Shawkānī, Muhammad Ibn 'Alī, *Faid al-Qadir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kalim al-Tayyib, 1414H), vol. 6, p.77.

³ Al-Rāzī, Fakhrudīn Muhammad Ibn 'Umar, *Mafāṭih al-Ghayb* (London: British Library, n.d.), vol 4, p. 143.

⁴ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol 14, 198.

⁵ Al-Tha'ālibī, Abu Zayd, *Al-Jawāhir al-Hisān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāath al-'Arabī, 1481H), p. 227.

This analysis is in contrast with Cragg's which claims that the verb 'yuṣallūn' means the activity of God Himself and which, however, the same verb the believers were commanded to emulate. It also repudiated his contention that *taṣliyah* contains "associationism" of the human with the divine which, as he claimed, brings Christians to what they have always believed to be the significance of Jesus in his person and his ministry.¹

Further, the previous analysis of Muslim scholars' views regarding this verse clearly illustrates that there is no possibility of finding the reason of divinity of Prophet Muḥammad SAW in this verse. Instead, it shows his absolute human nature since he is in need of Allah's mercy and forgiveness, and that the assertion of Cragg which sought to explore the doctrine of Incarnation into Islam by relying on this verse is unsubstantiated.

Some people may wonder why Cragg made this unfounded analysis despite his vast knowledge in the field of Islamic Studies. But when his modern approach, which is neither in line with Christianity nor with Islam, is critically examined and investigated, it will be clear that he ought to fall in this low ebb. This assertion is considered by Muslim scholars as a clear deception and betrayal to Muslims since it aims at describing Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in line with the Christian belief, the Incarnation. The Muslim scholars are, indeed, neither contented nor happy with this deceitful assertion. This is the reason why they refuted this claim seriously and argued that it is obnoxious and unacceptable in the Islamic teachings.

Mahmut Aydin for example, rejected this claim and argued by quoting the refutation of Khan and Jane I. Smith that;

He (Cragg) also makes the connection between the Qur'anic statement about the blessing of the Prophet with the New Testament statements about the Divine Sonship of Jesus Christ. It seems that he uses this connection to demonstrate that the Prophet Muḥammad in one sense "incarnated" the reality of God's message by humankind...In our opinion, this attempt of Cragg is repugnant to Islam, since it runs against the grain of basic Qur'anic teaching, which is that only a being who is completely human can provide effective guidance to humankind.²

¹ Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p. 65.

² Aydin, Mahmut, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since the Second Vatican Council*, (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002) p.185.

Buaben also pointed out that Muhammad cannot be assessed based on the Christian criteria. He maintains that, "The assessment of Muḥammad SAW on Christian principles is a very unsuitable methodology to be used in academic scholarship"¹. Moreover, not only Muslim scholars, even some of the Christian scholars are not happy with this exploration, because Muslims and Christians are in a total agreement that the doctrine of Incarnation and Islamic *Tawhīd* are not compatible, and that it remains as one of the fundamental beliefs in Christianity. Moreover, the Christian scholars are very much aware of the Qur'anic verses which unequivocally reject the doctrine of Incarnation. For example, in the *Qur'ān* Jesus is described as a son of Mary and not more than a servant of God. Allah says,

The Messiah, son of Mary is but an apostle; apostles before him have indeed passed away; and his mother was a truthful woman; they both used to eat food. See how We make the communication clear to them, then behold, how they are turned away" (Qur'ān 5: 75). Also in another place in the Qur'ān his miracles were said to be performed by Allah's permission. Allah says: "When Allah will say: O Jesus son of Mary! Remember My favor on you, when I strengthen you I with the Holy Spirit, you spoke to the people in the cradle and I when of old age, and when I taught the Book and the wisdom and Torah and the Gospel; and when you determined out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leprous by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead by My permission; and I withheld the children of Israel from you when you came to them with clear arguments, but those who disbelieved among them said: This is nothing but clear enchantment (Qur'ān, 5: 110)

In another place his crucifixion was denied. Allah says, And their saying: Surely we have killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah: and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so (like Jesus) and most surely those who differ therein are only in doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow conjecture, and they killed not for sure (Qur'ān, 4: 157).

These are some of the areas in which the Qur'ān clearly rejects the divinity or the divine sonship of Jesus Christ. There is no, however, a Muslim or Christian scholar who denies the existence of these Qur'anic attitudes towards Christian beliefs regarding Jesus Christ. If the *Qur'ān*

¹ Buaben, Jabal M., *Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West: A Study of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1996), p. 42.

clearly denies Jesus Christ such attributes to affirm the absoluteness of the oneness of Allah, *a fortiori* Prophet Muḥammad SAW to be denied.

Prophet Muḥammad SAW himself is reported to have warned Muslims against attaching divinity to his person. He says, “Do not exalt me beyond my limit as the Christians did in the person of son of Mary (Jesus). I am only His servant (God’s servant). Therefore, describe me as a servant and messenger of God”¹. Furthermore, many Christian scholars point out that Prophet Muḥammad SAW was unlike Jesus Christ; he did not possess divine nature. Geisler (1993) points out the Islamic perception on Muḥammad SAW and quotes the warning of Schimmel by saying that, “It is very important to point out that standard Islamic theology in no way considers him (Muḥammad) divine. As Schimmel accurately warns, “Neither in theological nor in phenomenological terms can Prophet Muḥammad be likened to the Christ of Christianity...”². Regrettably, with all these sources, Cragg claims that the Incarnation did exist in the *persona* of Prophet Muḥammad SAW. This obviously shows that Cragg’s work is not in line with scholarly deliberation. Aydin (2002) laments on Cragg’s deviation from scholarly way as he says;

“...although Cragg examined the question of the Prophethood of Muḥammad in a scholarly way in the light of the Qur’anic contents, it seems that his final verdict was “no longer from a scholarly position but a theological-apologetic intended to safeguard the core of the Christian faith.”³

Cragg’s deviation from scholarly approach occurred not only in his final verdict, but also in his analysis as has been observed in his attempt to forcefully describe the significance of Prophet Muḥammad SAW within the idioms of Christianity.

In Islamic viewpoint, any claim of compatibility of Incarnation with Islamic teaching is a great betrayal to the true nature and concept of *tawhīd*. In other words, the Incarnation in Christianity which connotes the idea that God is part of His own creation, or that His creation is part of Him is in no way compatible with the doctrine of Islamic *tawhīd*. In Islam, the concept of *tawhīd* maintains the absolute divinity and oneness of Allah. However,

¹ Ibn Hibbān, Muhammad, *Sahīh Ibn Hibbān*, (Misr: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1952).

² Geisler, Norman L., *Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1993), p. 83.

³ Aydin, Mehmet, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims Since the Second Vatican Council*, p. 15.

the assertion that Allah became human cannot, in any way, be in line with the Islamic views.

To be sure, when Islam calls for acknowledging Allah as Absolute in His divinity and in His oneness, the Christian belief stands on the opposite side calling for Incarnation and Trinity. Logically speaking, if that is the issue, how can then positive and negative be at the same point and call to the same thing with the same purpose and objective? This, indeed, is impossible as far as religious differences are concerned. However, when Cragg claimed for the similitude of Islam and Christianity in terms of the doctrine of Incarnation, many other Christian scholars on the other hand claimed its uniqueness and distinctiveness in Christianity. This evidently negates Cragg's claim that the doctrine of Incarnation is a shared term between Christianity and Islam. Hebblethwaite (2005) argued,

Whatever the Christian faith may share with other theistic religions, and however positive a role it may accord to other world faiths, its conviction of the divinity of Christ and its conviction of triune nature of God yield a world-view in these respects incommensurable with others. This is the doctrines of Incarnation and the Trinity that provide the linchpin of Christianity's understanding of the relationship between God and the world, past, present, and future. They spell out what makes Christianity...a theism of incarnation and reconciliation that can still be held to surpass all other theistic world-views in its scope and power.¹

The doctrine of Incarnation is nowhere to be found in the Islamic expressions, and any attempt to trace it will end in futility. To Muslims, and also to some Christians, this doctrine surpasses the expression of human ability. How can an idea which is beyond the Christian theologians' expression be forcefully imported into the monotheistic beliefs of Islam? Is that objectivity? No doubt that any attempt to make this assertion must be free from objectivity. Therefore, this doctrine must remain as a point of dialogue between Islam and Christianity. Nonetheless, this theological issue makes Muslim scholars to focus on writing and presenting disquieting challenges against this doctrine. Thomas wrote;

As they responded to the teachings of the Christians, Muslims were, of course, influenced and informed by the

¹ Hebblethwaite, Brian, *In Defense of Christianity* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 117-118.

Qur'an, in which the primary emphasis upon the oneness and distinctiveness of God excludes the possibility of close relationship between him and any creature. In the Qur'an one of the main ways in which this emphasis is expressed is in the repeated denial that Jesus was God's son... This teaching about the createdness of Jesus and rejection of his divinity or divine sonship was the most important influence upon Muslim attitudes towards the Incarnation... and it often provided Muslims with the framework for their actual arguments against Christian teachings.¹

Moreover, the implication of Cragg's exploration is apparent. It calls, in another way, to regarding Prophet Muḥammad SAW as a son of God. Analogically speaking, if the doctrine of Incarnation is intricately intertwined with the divine sonship of Jesus Christ, be it by birth or adaptation as Christian scholars point out, then Cragg, by implication is claiming the divine sonship of Prophet Muḥammad SAW. It is undeniably true that the divine sonship of Jesus Christ is the soul business of Incarnation. Then the result is that Muḥammad SAW is also the son of God as reflected in Cragg's notion of *taṣliyah* in the Islamic teachings. Cragg (1984) obviously pointed out this baseless similarity between Prophet Muḥammad SAW and Jesus in the following statement,

In respect of both, there is hope that, the very celebration of Muḥammad may suggest a clue to the New Testament recognition of Jesus. For what but *taṣliyah*, a divine salutation is the familiar New Testament Cry: 'This is My son, My Beloved hear him? Sonship, there, is the unity of wills, the harmony of ends, the point of the divine satisfaction in the human means of its translation into fact. *Taṣliyah*, evidently, is a kindred term, a Muslim and a Christian theme. Only the living translation differs.²

Cragg's discovery of Incarnation could therefore be rejected by the implication of its theological nature which suggests the divine sonship of Prophet Muḥammad SAW because in the Islamic '*aqīdah*, Muḥammad is

¹ Thomas, David, *Early Muslim Polemic Against Christianity* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 38.

² Cragg, Albert Kenneth, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*, p. 65.

considered as purely human without any element of divinity in his *persona*, and Allah as purely divine without any element of humanity in His person.

In the *Qur'ān*, numerous verses affirm this claim. Allah tells us how divine He is when He says, "Say: He, Allah, is one. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him" (Qur'an, 112:1-4). In another place He says, They say: (Allah) Most Gracious has begotten a son! Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! As if the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, that they invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the Majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son. Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant (Qur'ān, 19:88-93).

Furthermore, regarding the pure human nature of Prophet Muḥammad SAW Allah says, "Say: "I am but a man like yourselves, but the inspiration has come to me, that your God is One God, Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner" (Qur'ān, 18:110)

To conclude, *tawḥīd* cannot in any way be reconciled with the doctrine of Incarnation. The meaning and nature of the doctrine of incarnation still remain ambiguous for Christians. Hence, it is emphasized that Prophet Muḥammad SAW is purely human without any element of divinity in his person. Allah chose him and blessed his life and his death with *ṣalāh* which means His mercy and blessings and not His embodiment.

Conclusion

In the above discussion, the article attempted to analyze and evaluate Cragg's assertion on the manifestation of Incarnational doctrine in the Qur'anic text. Cragg's focal point is *Qur'ān* (33.56) where he made an untenable derivation and argued that the word *taṣliyah* in the verse shares the same notion with the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. However, this assertion has been critically analyzed and evaluated from the Islamic perspective. It has been pointed out that the word *taṣliyah* is literally used by the Arabs for '*ihrāq*' which means burning, and there is no connection in whatsoever sense between the involvement of God in *salāh* upon the Prophet SAW and the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. And as far as the Islamic concept of tawhid is concerned, *taṣliyah* and incarnation are irreconcilable.

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