# Review Article

## THE CALL OF THE MINARET

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Among the many books on Islam published recently, Dr. Kenneth Cragg's *The Call of the Minaret*[1] has a special relevance in respect of the reconciliation so urgently needed between Islam and Christianity today. It is written primarily with the intention of promoting a better understanding of Islam to Christian readers as well as of removing some of the traditional misconceptions in Islam with regard to certain fundamental doctrines of Christianity. It makes a fresh appeal both to the Muslim and the Christian for renewed effort to look sympathetically and objectively at each other's point of view in the light of contemporary thought and research in both religions.

The title of the book, *The Call of the Minaret*, is as attractive as Bevan-Jones's *The People of the Mosque*, and the ground covered in both is much the same. But Dr. Cragg's book, being a recent publication, has the advantage of dealing with circumstances which have appeared within the last decade, favourable to friendly conversation between the two religions.

*The Call of the Minaret* divides itself into three sections: The Contemporary Setting; Minaret and Muslim; and Minaret and Christian.

In the first section the author gives an interesting assessment of the contemporary situation in the world of Islam, which stretches out as the Crescent, the symbol of Islam, from Africa to China. He traces the resurgence of nationalism in all Islamic countries, and describes how most of them now share with other free countries, the responsibilities and privileges of co-existence (p. 12). In the realms of education, commerce, science and technology, as well as in social and religious matters within the community, the Muslims are encountering unprecedented situations. All these are drawing them away from the old limitations of orthodoxy which appear out of date and unsuitable. One of the important features of contemporary Islam is the weakening of traditional fanaticism, and an increasing willingness of some

[1] Published by the Oxford University Press, New York, 1956. Pp. 376. Price $6.25.

Muslims to engage in friendly and equal debate with other religions, especially Christianity (p. 25).

Drawing attention to this remarkable change in the psychology of the Muslim, the author in the second section, Minaret and Muslim, appeals to the Christian to make an objective and sympathetic study of the Muslim faith. He pleads for a better understanding of the Muslim position, to invoke an adequate response to the new outlook in present-day Islam.

The author makes an ingenious use of the *Adhan* (Call to Prayer) as a basis to describe the various aspects of Muslim religion. The formula 'There is no God except God, and Muhammad is the Apostle of God. Come ye unto prayer. Come ye unto good' opens up to the author the various strands of Muslim faith and practice. The fundamental ideas of the unity of God as the Muslim understands it, the apostleship of Muhammad, the devotional life and social order in Islam, are all drawn from this oft-repeated and familiar call of the minaret. The most attractive and commendable feature of this section of the book is the sympathetic and non-belligerent spirit in which the author deals with the doctrinal intricacies of the Muslim faith. Even a devout Muslim reader of this analysis of his religion would find it a just appreciation of his faith, for it is done by one who has made a thorough and scientific study of Islam. Dr. Cragg adds to it the experience of many years spent living among Muslims in the Middle East.

The third section, Minaret and Christian, is the most interesting part of the book from the point of view of the Christian reader. Just as the call of the minaret is a proclamation of the Muslim of what his religion stands for, it is a challenge to the Christian for a renewed effort to face squarely the centuries-old erroneous ideas in Islam regarding the Christian faith. The orthodox Muslim believes that Islam was divinely appointed to resist and rectify the errors of Christianity. 'Islam claims that in its historic faith the Church has misconstrued the mission of Jesus. Since the errors involved the central points of the Christians' understanding of Jesus, His Incarnation, His death upon the Cross, the issue admits of no reconciliation. The Muslim sees Islam correcting Christian "distortion" of Jesus and of God' (p. 245). And so Islam since its inception has opposed Christianity as a religion that has gone wrong, to be rectified only by the purer teaching of Islam which came later to correct and supersede the older religion.

The author tells us that it was unfortunate that in the early formative years of Muhammad's quest for truth he had no access to the 'historic' faith of the Church. Instead he came in contact with Christians of certain heretical sects, namely the Monophysites, the Nestorians and a section of the orthodox Catholic Church which laid undue stress on the veneration of the Virgin Mary. These had been condemned by the Great Councils, and had taken refuge in and around Arabia. He firmly believes that

had the Prophet of Arabia come in contact with genuine Christianity at the time, the history of Arabia might have been different (p. 263).

Dr. Cragg goes on to describe 'five important areas' in which the heretical Christians in the Arabia of Muhammad's time erred in presenting the historic faith of the Church. These are 'the Christian scriptures, the Person of Jesus, the Christian doctrine of God, and the Christian Church and Christian Society' (p. 275). The challenge of the call of the minaret to the Christians today lies in a careful and sympathetic presentation of these fundamental doctrines of traditional Christianity. The author devotes a whole chapter (pp. 271–331), expounding these doctrines from the Christian angle, using many illuminating meeting points in Muslim and Christian scriptures and teaching. To a Muslim who is prepared to read this chapter with an unbiased and open mind Dr. Cragg's exposition should be most helpful in removing the age-old misconceptions which have been a barrier to the understanding of true Christianity.

In the last chapter of the book, the author deals with the question of paucity of converts from Islam. Apart from the difficulties a Muslim has to face from within his own religion and community, there are many obstacles which the Church itself places in the way of effective evangelism among Muslims. The latter are far more serious than the obstacles which come from Islam itself. Among these is the attitude of the Church towards a convert from Islam. The Church to this day has not realized the need of extending a sympathetic and affectionate welcome to the new convert. Instead of being gladly and affectionately welcomed to the Christian brotherhood, the Muslim convert is looked upon with suspicion and fear. It is little realized how much it has cost him to renounce the fellowship of his own community. He is accused of having ulterior motives in joining the Church. But the worst injury is inflicted by those who express the opinion that sooner or later the convert will turn back to Islam. Dr. Cragg mentions several converts from Islam by name on page 345, who by their sacrifice and labour in the cause of the Master have not only testified to the genuineness of their conversion but have proclaimed to the end of their days that the Spirit of Christ is stronger than any other bond of allegiance, and that it is wrong to assume that a Muslim convert will fall back eventually to his community.

Towards the close of his book (pp. 347–350) Dr. Cragg makes a suggestion with regard to the integration of Muslim converts into the Church. Because there is a constant pull on a convert from his old community, especially with the threat of the consequences of apostasy, and because the Church is slow in welcoming him into its midst, and also because he should not become an alien to Muslim society and the local community, it may be expedient to appoint for him 'a new status, in which those who respond or desire to respond to Christ, might be encouraged to

associate with fellow or potentially fellow Christians, without alienating their old context irrevocably by any formal step which that context will so interpret' (p. 348); the status suggested is that of 'Lovers of Jesus' (p. 349) for whom 'baptism is left in abeyance'. The intention is not to designate them as secret believers, for no sincere seeker can remain hidden and unknown. The idea is to wean them gradually from their old context, and not hurry them into the new environment of the Church. The period of probation would give sufficient time to the 'Lovers of Jesus' to study the pros and cons of the eventual break with their old religion, and will give sufficient time to the receiving community to make room for them in their midst. The only object of this expedient is 'to encourage the hope and ideal of larger and more viable units of baptism than the individual and to discourage Muslim misconception and antagonism' (p. 349).

This book is an excellent example of the type of literature needed today to bridge the centuries-old misconceptions between Islam and Christianity. The reviewer would commend the book heartily to those who are striving for a better understanding between the two faiths and a happier relationship between their adherents.

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*Hindu theism is different from Christian theism in conceiving both the purpose and the nature of Incarnation. Hindu incarnations are for the purpose of restoring the lost balance in the static morality called* Varṇāśrama Dharma. *Hence it needs an incarnation every time there is an upsetting of the balance. It posits accordingly many incarnations. Christian theism is based upon a higher dynamic morality, which is expressive of the nature of both God and man, which values man as man, and which permits of no complete transcending of the moral. In such a moral order the purpose of Incarnation will be the revelation in time and space of a 'God who lives in the perpetual giving of Himself, who shares the life of His finite creatures, bearing in and with them the whole burden of their finitude, their sinful wanderings and sorrows, and the suffering without which they cannot be made perfect.' This is the purpose and meaning of Christian Incarnation, which, once staged on the plane of time, is enough to symbolize, once and for ever, God's act of redemption continued through eternity.*