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### Book Review

## A Critical Exploration to Godfrey Higgins's Apology from the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

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**Abstract.** In the book, "An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious," Godfrey Higgins (1772-1833) presents "Persian empire and the oriental part of the Roman empire at the beginning of the seventh century," "the emergence of Islam," "the Prophet Muhammad's (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam [SAW]) character, and mission," "there is no god but Allah," and "Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger of Allah." He also compared Christianity (Bible) and Islam (Qur'an) in detailed. Higgins noted that the object of the book is to abate the spirit of intolerance that existed between Christians and Muslims. The review emphasizes the book's contribution to fostering a rational understanding of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Islam for researchers interested in Islamic history and those who are curious about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Islam.

**Keywords:** Godfrey Higgins, Prophet Muhammad, Apology, Islam, Christianity.

## INTRODUCTION

Godfrey Higgins (1772-1833) was an English magistrate and landowner, a prominent advocate for social reform, historian, and antiquarian. He wrote concerning ancient myths. He has been termed a “political radical, reforming county magistrate and idiosyncratic historian of religions.”<sup>1</sup> *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious* is a book written by Godfrey Higgins in 1829.<sup>2</sup> In the following decades, the book was published much many times by various publishing houses. Lastly, it has been published by Legare Street Press in 2022.<sup>3</sup> In the book's preface, Higgins noted the aim of the book as follows: The object of the following Essay is to abate the mischievous spirit of intolerance which has hitherto existed between the followers of Jesus and those of Mohamed, by shewing that the religions of both, however unfortunately changed by time, are the same in their original foundation and principle.<sup>4</sup>

The book was prepared under a single title called “Apology”. The topics were presented in articles, and there is a total of 237 items in the book. Firstly, Higgins wrote that the Persian empire or the oriental part of the Roman empire was in an unhappy state at the beginning of the seventh century. At this time the religion of Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam [SAW]) emerged and teared to pieces the Roman empire. In later articles, Higgins noted that Christian writers made false statements about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He quoted Humphrey Prideaux<sup>5</sup> (1648-1724), a Cornish churchman, orientalist, and dean of Norwich in several places of the book. Higgins talked about the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) birth, giving the duty of prophethood to Muhammad (SAW), the events that took place before and after the migration (Hegira) from Mecca to Medina until the death of the Prophet. The author emphasized Muhammad (SAW) was of high character, and that the greatest pleasure of believers is to watch the beauty of Allah in the hereafter. He also states that Muhammad (SAW) was the only legislator who defined the exact measure of benevolence and that it was found only in Islam, while in Christianity the poor were forgotten and priests took tithes. He also draws attention to the difference

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<sup>1</sup>Godfrey Higgins. (2022). From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godfrey\\_Higgins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godfrey_Higgins).

<sup>2</sup>Higgins, Godfrey. (1829). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. London: Rowland Hunter, Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/anapologyforlifoomugooq>.

<sup>3</sup>Higgins, Godfrey. (2022). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. Legare Street Press.

<sup>4</sup>Higgins, Godfrey. (1829). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. London: Rowland Hunter, Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/anapologyforlifoomugooq>, p. vii.

<sup>5</sup>Humphrey Prideaux. (2023) From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humphrey\\_Prideaux](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humphrey_Prideaux).

between fanaticism and philosophy, emphasizing that Islam is an original, pure, very simple and philosophical religion free from difficulties.

Notwithstanding all the glosses and misrepresentations of Prideaux and other Christian authors, it is very evident that, until the Hegira, the life and moral conduct of Mohamed had been correct in a high degree.<sup>6</sup> In a word, he may justly be said to have lived like a hero, and to have died like a philosopher.<sup>7</sup> Works of supererogation were odious to a prophet who censured in his companions a rash vow of abstaining from flesh, and women, and sleep; and firmly declared that he would have no monks in his religion.<sup>8</sup>

Mohamed is perhaps the only legislator who has defined the precise measure of charity: the standard may vary with the degree and nature of property, as it consists either in money, in cord or cattle, in fruits or merchandise; but the Musselman does not accomplish the law, unless he bestows a tenth of his revenue; and if his conscience accuses him of fraud or extortion, the tenth, under the idea of restitution, is enlarged to a fifth. In no religion, except in that of Mohamed, can anything like this be found.<sup>9</sup>

I recollect no fanaticism or even religion which has not been either clogged with monstrous absurdities, or with extreme complication, or with both. But of all the established religions which I have ever read of, that of Mohamed is at once the most simple and the most philosophical, and in its original purity the least clogged with difficulties of any kind. Nothing can be more simple than its creed or confession of faith - God is God, and Mohamed is his prophet (i. e. his messenger or preacher, resoul, sent of God).<sup>10</sup>

Higgins wrote that how the Holy Qur'an was turned into a book after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger of Allah by citing the Holy Qur'an. He also states that even a single letter of the Qur'an is non-wrong and is the word of Allah, but this cannot be said for the Bible. He also gave an example of the Qur'anic verse about repentance and stated that whoever believes in Allah and the Day of Judgment will be rewarded. He also noted the following: Contrary to Christian belief, great merit is attributed to those who do good deeds in the Holy Qur'an, he explained in detail the characteristics

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<sup>6</sup>Higgins, Godfrey. (1829). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. London: Rowland Hunter, Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/anapologyforlifoomugooq>, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

of pious people by citing the Holy Qur'an, and noted that Jesus was the son of Mary, and that the world could not produce more sublime passages than those found in the Holy Qur'an. Higgins's following sentences were included in the book of "Nur Fountain," from the *Risale-i Nur Collection*<sup>11</sup>, a tafsir of the Holy Qur'an written by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi<sup>12</sup> (1877-1960): "Not a precept in it (Koran) can be pointed out which contains the slightest leaning to political servility. And as the Westminster Reviewer has justly observed, if there be any thing that ever holds an eastern despot in check, it is probably an unceremonious verse from the Koran in the mouth of a daring remonstrant"<sup>13</sup>

The grand piece of evidence, upon which most authors have relied, has been the Koran: every word, and even letter, of which is now held by the Mohamedans to have been written by divine inspiration, and therefore free from error; as many Christians at this day consider the gospels. But notwithstanding these very high pretensions, this work is attended with very many and very great difficulties.<sup>14</sup>

No doubt a preference in the heavenly mansions is given in the Koran, as may well be expected, to its believers; but inferior places are assigned to many others, according to the good works which they have performed. For great merit is ascribed to those who perform good work, contrary to the pernicious dogma of millions of Christians, who hold, as I have often heard it held from the pulpit, that merit has nothing to do with salvation.<sup>15</sup> The Koran constantly bears testimony to the divine mission of Jesus, calling him the Messiah; Jesus, the son of Mary; the sent of God; and his word which he conveyed unto Mary; and a breath (emanation) from him: and insists on the miraculous circumstances of his birth, in the same identical terms as the Christian Evangelists.<sup>16</sup> Probably the world cannot produce finer or more sublime passages than are to be found in the Koran.<sup>17</sup>

Higgins noted that there are incomprehensible creeds in the Christian religion, that Islam is a beautiful, simple and understandable religion, that there is only one belief in Allah, and that Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger and prophet of Allah.

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<sup>11</sup>Nursi Bediüzzam Said (2024). *From the Risale-i Nur Collection. Nur Fountain (in Ottoman Turkish)*. Istanbul: Envar Neşriyat. p. 237."

<sup>12</sup>Nursi, Said. (2024). *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Said\\_Nurs%C3%AE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Said_Nurs%C3%AE).

<sup>13</sup>Higgins, Godfrey. (1829). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. London: Rowland Hunter, Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/anapologyforlifoomugooq>, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

He drew attention to the importance of humility, cleanliness and prayer in Islam. He also criticized the practices in Christianity by comparing Islam and Christianity.

When the numerous, lengthened and almost unintelligible creeds of the Christian religion are contemplated, a philosopher may perhaps be tempted to heave a sigh of regret for the beautiful, plain, intelligible and unadorned simplicity of the Mohamedan profession of faith: I believe in one God, and Mohamed the apostle or messenger of God, In other form: God is God, and Mohamed is his prophet; or, / believe in God and in the doctrines respecting him taught by the preacher Mohamed.<sup>18</sup> But the Mahometan religion is destitute of priesthood or sacrifice; and the independent spirit of fanaticism looks down with contempt on the ministers and the slaves of superstition. How happy would it have been for Europe if the religion of Jesus, in a similar manner, had forbidden the use of priests or priesthods!<sup>19</sup>

Higgins recorded that after the Christian religion had a light to illuminate for six hundred years, Islam rose, and that Muhammad (SAW) was a prophet sent by Allah to correct the immorality of the followers of Jesus and the corruption of their religion. He also noted that Muhammad's (SAW) religion was the religion of the heart, that the priests and chief priests were arrogant and hypocritical, that Muhammad (SAW) destroyed them, and that the truth of the claim that Jesus performed miracles was accepted in the Holy Qur'an.

The true religion of the incomparable Jesus, of the city of Nazareth, was, in a most peculiar manner, the poor man's religion. The religion of Mohamed was the religion of the heart; it required neither creeds, altars, nor sacrifices; and if there was one thing more odious to its Founder than another, it was the cant and hypocrisy of Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests. Priests and chief priests actually stank beneath his nostrils, and Mohamed, in abolishing them, proved himself a better Gospel Christian than we have ever seen since.<sup>20</sup> It must not be forgotten that the divine mission, and the truth of the assertion that Jesus performed miracles, are admitted in almost every page of the Koran.<sup>21</sup>

Christians, to blind themselves, may turn into ridicule as much as they please the idea that Mohamed was the promised person, but this will not change the fact, that he was so considered, and is yet so considered,

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<sup>18</sup>Higgins, Godfrey. (1829). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. London: Rowland Hunter, Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/anapologyforlifoomugooq>, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

by one hundred and fifty millions of persons. When, as I have read, forty thousand commentators were at work on the Koran, it cannot be supposed that everything which Arabian skill and sagacity could devise, would fail to be said. You say the New Testament teaches that the spirit of truth should come. True, the spirit of truth did come; he came in Mohamed, who was inspired with the spirit of truth. This is the true meaning of your figurative expression, and the whole that it will fairly bear.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the book "An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious", Godfrey Higgins presents "unhappy situations of the Persian empire and the oriental part of the Roman empire at the beginning of the seventh century," "the emergence of Islam," "the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW), character, lifestyle, mission and purpose," "there is no god but Allah," "Muhammad (SAW) is the messenger of Allah," and "the Qur'an is the word of Allah." He also compared Christianity and Islam in detailed. He showed that Christianity and Islam are the same in terms of their original foundations, but Christianity was corrupt by time and Islam was the true religion. He highlighted that the Qur'an is non-wrong, but this cannot be said for the Bible. The book also included false statements of some Christian writers about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). It is an useful book for researchers interested in Islamic history and those who are curious about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Islam.

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<sup>22</sup> Higgins, Godfrey. (1829). *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia, Called Mohamed, or The Illustrious*. London: Rowland Hunter, Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/anapologyforlifoomugooq>, pp. 84-85.

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