



MUHAMMAD'S PROPHETHOOD

AN ANALYTICAL VIEW

by

DR. JAMAL A. BADAWI

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the name of Almighty God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

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I. INTRODUCTION

A great deal has been said about the prophet of Islam by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. What has been said, however, has been largely coloured by the writer's preconditioning; whether he is a believer in or a critic of Islam.

For Muslims, the question of Muhammad's true prophethood is indisputable. They firmly believe that he is a true prophet and Messenger of God, through whom God's divine revelations throughout history were culminated and perfected, thus forming the universal divine message to mankind. For critics of Islam, generally, it is Muhammad (P), rather than God, who is the founder of Islam, the author of its teachings, and the composer of its holy book, the Qur'an. How could a sincere and "neutral" researcher examine both claims and arrive at his own conclusions?

It is suggested that the search for an answer to this question may be facilitated if one simple rule of objective research is observed. The researcher should try to rid himself of the predominance of emotions, prejudices and preconceptions. This is a demanding requirement of the believer, the critic, and the neutral researcher as well. It is demanding because no man can free himself completely of emotions, prejudices, and preconceptions. Yet, an honest researcher could still try his best before any objective and fair assessment of any issue can be reached.

This paper is a humble attempt in this direction. It brings into focus some of the main issues which relate to the question of Muhammad's Prophethood, analyse them, and explore the conclusions to which such analysis may lead. The approach which is followed throughout the paper is hopefully, a rational one; one that does not start off with either an unquestioned acceptance of Muhammad's Prophethood, or with a prejudicial rejection of the same.

Since it was the critics of Muhammad (P) who took the lead in raising questions and doubts about his prophethood, a brief word about the changing nature of their critique may be enlightening.

* (P) in this text means peace be upon him.

II. CHANGING ATTITUDES OF MUHAMMAD'S CRITICS.

One simplified way of classifying their critique is to divide it into three slightly overlapping stages:

1) **The Polemic Era.** Writers in this group seem to have been motivated by religious prejudices. Their approach did not reflect an honest spirit of enquiry, perhaps because their writings were intended, at least partially, to arouse the feeling of hatred and fury against Muslims. This feeling succeeded in generating a poisonous atmosphere which was exploited to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the secular and/or religious establishments. The crusades against Muslims were perhaps one implication of this attitude. With these mud-slinging tendencies, there was hardly any indecent character that was not attributed to Islam and the Prophet of Islam. With feverish and fanatical hatred, no room was left for fact finding, open-mindedness, or even logic. As such, the ends justified the means; distortions, misrepresentations, half-truths, and at times sheer fabrications were freely used.¹

2) **Disguised Polemic:** As the polemic era lost its momentum, a more careful and disguised Polemic was introduced. Writers in this group criticized their predecessors as extremists, refrained from indecent and open attacks on Islam and Muhammad (P). Yet, their motives were not significantly different from their predecessors'. Most of them apparently realized that due to the forces of history, the masses became more educated, at least to the extent of ruling out sheer fabrications as effective offensive weapons against Islam. Their approach, however, still reflected an earnest endeavour to develop more effective weapons to destroy Islam or at least to belittle it. It is not a coincidence that such motives were often connected with the writers' colonial and/or missionary affiliation and orientation.

¹For some examples of this type of polemic, see Ahmad, Khurshid, *Islam and the West*, Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan, 2nd ed., 1967.

3) **The Inevitable Inconsistency:** A more tolerant yet perplexing attitude then came into being. Some writers began even to give credit to Islam as a powerful and viable ideology and to Muhammad (P) as a man with positive and moral qualities. His sincerity, sacrifices, and the instrumental role he played in bringing about spiritual, moral, and material upliftment to humanity were all admitted. One thing, however, was not admitted as readily: Was Muhammad (P) a true prophet who received divine revelation from God, and was the Qur'an really a divine book or was it of Muhammad's own making?

No matter how courteous, mild, or apparently objective these writers may seem to be, a serious question of consistency would inevitably arise here: How consistent is it to admit the sincerity and high moral characters of Muhammad (P), while implying that he was not truthful when he claimed to be a prophet of God, or when he claimed that the Qur'an was not of his own making, or when he claimed that he did not derive his teachings from any human source? It is this latter question that will be explored in some detail in this paper. To do this exploration, however, it would be helpful to clarify the methodology that will be followed.

III. A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY.

In an honest pursuit of an answer to the above question, it is logical to start off by finding out what was Muhammad's claim. Having done this, it would be fair to evaluate and discuss such a claim without accepting it or rejecting it off-hand. Such an acceptance of or rejection of Muhammad's truthfulness should only follow the analysis and over-all evaluation of the salient arguments, facts, and questions pertaining to the issue.

THE CLAIM.

Reference to the Qur'an, to the sayings of Muhammad (P), and to historical material, consistently indicate that

Muhammad (P) claimed to be God's Prophet and Messenger to mankind, that the Qur'an was not of his own making, and that what he preached (Islam) was divinely and not humanly inspired.²

THE CRITIQUE

In evaluating the above claim, there seem to be two possibilities; first, that this claim was a truthful one; second, that this claim was not a truthful one, i.e., a fabrication. If the first possibility is accepted, whether by faith or by reason or by combination there-of, then the question of Muhammad's true prophethood is settled. If, however, the second possibility is still open, how could it be objectively verified or refuted?

Only Two Possibilities: It is important to emphasize at this point that Muhammad's claim of prophethood is subject to only two possibilities; truthfulness or fabrication. It may be contended that many critics of Islam do not use the term fabrication to refer to Muhammad's claim of prophethood. It may be added also that they talk and write about

²*The Qur'an is God's divine message:*

"So I do call to witness what you see. And what you see not, That this is verily the word of an honoured apostle. It is not the word of a poet: little it is you believe. Nor is it the word of a soothsayer: little admonition it is you receive. (This is) a Message sent down from the Lord of the Worlds." (Qur'an 69:38-43).

The Qur'an is not produced by anyone save God:

"This Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than God; on the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the Book—where in there is no doubt—from the Lord of the worlds. Or do they say: (he forged it)? Say: (Bring then a Sura like unto it, and Call (to your aid) anyone you can, besides God, if it be you speak the truth." (Qur'an 10-37-38).

It is not up to Muhammad (P) to get it together:

"If you bring them not a revelation, they say: (why has you not got it together?) Say: "I but follow what is revealed to one from my Lord: This is (nothing but) Lights from your Lord, and Guidance, and Mercy, for any who have faith." (Qur'an 7:203)

Nor is it up to Muhammad (P) to change any of the contents of the Qur'an:

Muhammad (P) with considerable respect and admiration (like many other great men and heros!) Is the mere fact that they say or imply that Muhammad (P) was a great social reformer and a remarkable composer of an influential book, the Qur'an – is this sufficient to infer that they do in fact accuse Muhammad (P) of not being a truthful man, i.e., that they impute dishonesty on him?

Without “beating around the bush”, it should be said, in all candidness that it doesn't matter how “nicely”. “diplomatically”, or “courteously” are the ideas stated. What really matters are the logical implications of these statements. If an apparently fair and objective writer does not dispute the fact that Muhammad (P) *did claim* that what he taught was neither of his own making nor was it derived from any human source, and if the same writer says or implies later on that Muhammad (P) was the *Composer or Compiler* of the Qur'an, then what he is really saying is that Muhammad (P) was not truthful (or sane) when he claimed the divine origin of Islam. This questioning of Muhammad's personal integrity and truthfulness can still be done in the

“But when Our Clear Signs are rehearsed unto them, those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, say: (bring us a Reading Other than this, or change this,) Say: (it is not for me, of my own accord, to change it: I follow only what is revealed unto me: if I were to disobey my Lord, I should myself fear the penalty of a Great Day (to come).”
(Qur'an 10:15, see also 10:16)

For nothing is more wicked than inventing a lie against God or making a false claim of receiving revelations from Him:
“Who can be more wicked than one who invents a lie against God, or says, (I have received inspiration,) when he received none, or (again) who says: (I can reveal the like of what God has revealed)? If you could but see how the wicked (do fare) in the flood of confusion at death!—the angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), (Yield up your souls: this day shall you receive your reward,—a penalty of shame, for that you used to tell lies against God, and scornfully to reject of His Signs!” (Qur'an 6:93)

It would be highly illogical to say that Muhammad(P) composed the Qur'an whose very verses severely condemn such composition as a shameful act which is not surpassed in its wickedness!

most “nice”, “courteous”, yet misleading manner. It is this *courteous inconsistency*, and in some cases hypocrisy that is likely to mislead the reader, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. “Diplomacy” or “Public Relations” type of statements are no substitute for candid, objective, and rigorous research in an important subject as the present one.

But Why Fabricate? If the researcher was to avoid the above “courteous inconsistency”, he would then assume either of the two possibilities (truthfulness or dishonesty) and seek all evidence that may verify or refute his assumption. Since these two possibilities are contrary to each other, it makes a little difference which one may be assumed to initiate the analysis. For the convenience of presentation it may be useful to see if the assumption of possible fabrication can be substantiated.

If it were true that Muhammad’s claim of prophethood was a mere fabrication, then two sub-possibilities may present themselves; a) that he might have fabricated this claim deliberately and knowingly, or b) that he might have done so unconsciously.

IV. CONSCIOUS FABRICATION?

Deliberate fabrication, like other patterns of human behaviour is likely to have a goal; the satisfaction of certain human needs. Arrogation of prophethood may thus be motivated either by some material benefit or by the aspiration to status, glory, and power. We may as well look into these two possibilities.

A) Fabrication for Material Gains?

It is reasonable to assert that Muhammad (P) might have claimed prophethood in order to attain some material gains? This question may be answered by looking into his financial status before and after prophethood. Before his mission as a

prophet, Muhammad (P) had no financial worries. His loving and rich wife, Khadija, has had made available to him all what he needed. As a successful and reputed merchant, Muhammad (P) drew a satisfactory and comfortable income. It is ironic that the same man, after his mission as a prophet and because of it, became worse off materially.

Describing their life, his wife, Aa'isha narrated that a month or two might have elapsed before fire was lit in the prophet's house (to cook a meal), while the household subsisted on milk and dates.³ After eighteen years of his mission, when Muslims were the victorious, we still find a kind of revolt in Muhammad's household in protest of the difficult life characterized by a considerable self-imposed material deprivation. This incident took place at the time when the Muslim treasury was under his disposal.⁴ Asked about Muhammad's bedding, Hafsa answered, "It comprised of a piece of canvas which I spread double folded under him. Once I did it fourfold in an effort to make it more comfortable. The next morning he asked me: 'What did you spread under me last night'. I replied: 'The same canvas, but I had fourfolded it instead of the customary double fold'. He said: 'Keep it as it was before. The additional softness stands in the way of Tahajjud (night prayer)'".⁵ When Omar Ibn-Khattab went to see Muhammad (P) he noticed that "the contents of his room comprised of only three pieces of tanned skin and a handful of barley lying in a corner. I looked about but I failed to find anything else. I began to weep. He said: "Why are you weeping?" I replied: 'O Prophet of Allah' why should I not weep? I can see the

³Cited in M. Al-Nawawi *Riyadh al-Saliheen Min Kalam Sayyid-il-Mursaleen*, Hadeeth #492 (Several Printings of this source were published. The printing cited above is published by Shirkat-al-Shimirley, Cairo, Egypt, no date.)

⁴This incident is referred to in the Qur'an (33:28-29). It is also documented in *Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*.

⁵Idara Ishaat-E-Diniyat, *The Teachings of Islam*, New Delhi, no date, P.50.

mat's pattern imprinted on your body and I am also beholding all that you have got in this room. O prophet of Allah! Pray that Allah may grant ample provisions for us. The Persians and the Romans who have no true faith and who worship not Allah but their kings – the Kaisers and the Caesars – should live in gardens with streams running in their midst but the chosen Prophet and the accepted slave of Allah should live in such a dire poverty!' The Prophet (P) was resting against his pillow, but when he heard me talk like this, he sat against his pillow and said, 'O, Omar! Are you still in doubt about this matter? Ease and comfort in the hereafter are much better than ease and comfort in this world.'⁶ In a long narrative by Bilal about what Muhammad (P) did with the gifts and provisions he received, Bilal reported that the Prophet never kept back anything for future use, that he spent what he had on the poor and needy, and that on one occasion Muhammad received a gift of four loaded camels, yet he took nothing for himself and he further insisted that he would not go home until the *whole* lot is given away to the needy.⁷ At the time of his death, and in spite of all his victories and achievements, Muhammad (P) was in debt, and his shield was in the hands of a Jewish citizen of Madina as a collateral for that debt!⁸

One may then inquire: Are there any indications of materialistic motives behind Muhammad's claim of prophethood?

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. A similar narrative is also cited in Al-Tirmithi and reproduced in *Riyadh al-Saliheen*, op.cit., Hadeeth #486.

⁷*The Teachings of Islam*, op.cit., P.P. 55-57, see also *Riyadh al-Saliheen*, op.cit., Hadeeths No. 465 and 466.

⁸*Riyadh al-Saliheen*, op.cit., Hadeeth No. 504. The Study of the history of Islam shows that Muhammad's example of sacrifice was followed by many of his companions and their successors until this day.

For further documentation on Muhammad's self-imposed deprivation, one may refer to a large number of narratives reported by his contemporaries. All these narratives show consistently his sacrificial life and the extent of hunger which he chose to undergo from the

B) Fabrication for Worldly Glory and Power?

Is it possible that Muhammad (P) might have claimed prophethood in order to attain status, worldly greatness, and power? The desire to enjoy status and power is usually associated with good food, fancy clothing, monumental palaces, colorful guards, and the indisputable authority.

Do any of these indicators apply of Muhammad (P)? Following are a few glimpses of his life that may help answer this question.

Despite of his responsibilities as a prophet, a teacher, a statesman, and a Judge, Muhammad (P) used to milk his goat, mend his clothes, repair his shoes, and help with the household work. His life was an amazing model of simplicity and humbleness.⁹ He sat on the floor, went to the market to shop with no guards or procession; he talked and listened patiently and politely to anyone who stopped him, and he accepted invitations to dine with the poor and ate graciously whatever was served to him. Once he was travelling with some of his companions who began to prepare to cook some food by dividing the work among themselves. Muhammad (P) suggested to be in charge of collecting some wood. His companions told him that they could do it for him.

beginning of his mission until his death. See for example *Riyadh Al-Saliheen, Ibid.*, Ahadeeth Nos. 474, 491 and 507 (narrated by his wife A'isha), No. 475 (narrated by his brother-in-law, Amr Ibn-al-Harith), No. 473 (narrated by Omar), Nos. 493, 497 (narrated by Abu-Hurairah), Nos. 494 and 421 (narrated by Anas), No. 495 (narrated by No'man Ibn-Basheer), No. 496 (narrated by Sahl Ibn-Sa'ad), No. 500 (narrated by Sa'ad Ibn-Abi-Waqqas), No. 520 (narrated by Gaber), and No. 499 (narrated by Abu-Musa Al-Asha'ari). Further narratives may be found in standard books of Hadeeth.

⁹A large number of Ahadeeth (sayings of Muhammad "P") call for simplicity and humbleness and warn against *excess* indulgence in worldly pleasures. It was Muhammad's Practice of what he Preached that provided a living example for his followers and commanded their trust. See for example *Ibid.*, Nos. 457, 458, 459, 461, 463, 464, 467, 468, 471, 472, 477, 481, and 516.

Muhammad (P) answered back, "I know you could do it for me but I hate to have any privilege over you".¹⁰ A stranger once came to him almost trembling out of respect. Muhammad (P) asked the man to come closer to him and with a compassionate pat on the man's shoulder, he told him: "Relax brother, I am only the son of a woman who used to eat dried bread".¹¹

Muhammad's use of authority is quite revealing. His followers loved him, respected him, and trusted him to an amazing extent. Yet, he continued to emphasize that obedience and devotion should be directed to God and not to him personally. As a matter of fact, he made a clear distinction between the specific revelations he received from God and other areas left to human discretion. In the latter category, evidence of Muhammad's consultative attitudes is ample. In planning for the defense of Madinah (before the battle of the Trench), Muhammad (P) asked for the advice of his companions and decided in favor of Salman's proposal to dig a trench around Madinah. Furthermore, he started working with his hands like any other man in his company. A similar behavior was demonstrated in the battle of Badr.¹²

In addition to the simple, humble, and altruistic life of Muhammad (P) one may also ask: Was there any indication in his early life that demonstrates his aspiration for leadership and fame? Critics of Muhammad (P) fail to provide an evidence that he planned or aspired to leadership and fame. Even a writer who goes into a great length to support his

¹⁰Khalid, Khalid M., *Insaniyyat Muhammad*, Maktabat Wahbah, Cairo, Egypt, 2nd Printing, 1963, P. 67.

¹¹*Ibid.*, P. 65.

¹²Joma'a, Muhammad L., *Thawrat-ul-Islam Wabatalul-Anbi'a*, Maktabat-ul-Nahdhah, Cairo, Egypt, 1959, P.P. 302 and 401. In the battle of Badr, it was the proposal of Al-Habbab Ibn Al-Manthir that substituted Muhammad's own proposal. See *Sirat Ibn-Hisham*, under Ghazwat Badr al-Kobra (available in several printings, one of which is *Tahtheeb Sirat Ibn. Hisham*, compiled by Abdussalam Harun, Dar Al-Fikr, 1954, vol. 1, p. 146.

guess that Muhammad (P) probably had some “secret desires” to be famous cannot help but admit that Muhammed (P) was not guilty of planning for his role as a prophet.¹³ Not only was Muhammad (P) an ordinary and a quiet, person, but he even trembled and rushed home in terror when he received the first revelation as a prophet of God. If he were planning or aspiring for fame, he would have come down happy and jubilant that his “secret desires” are finally coming true.¹⁴ Andrae’s theory of “secret desires” and similar theories are perhaps modern versions of the pagan Arabs’ initial interpretation of Muhammad’s motives. Long before there was any prospect of success of the new faith and at the outset of a long and painful era of torture, suffering, and persecution of Muhammad (P) and his followers, he received an interesting offer. An envoy of the pagan leaders, Okba, came to him saying”. . . if you want money, we will collect enough money for you so that you will be the richest one of us. If you want leadership we will take you as our leader and and never decide on any matter without your approval. If you want kingship we will crown you king over us. And if you can’t resist the visions that come to you we will spend all that is needed to seek a cure for you . . .”¹⁵ Only one concession was required from Muhammad (P) in return for that, to stop “dividing the people” and to give up this new claim that there is not god but the One Universal God of all. This was not a high price if Muhammad (P) were pursuing his own benefit. Was Muhammad (P) hesitant when the offer was made? Did he turn it down as a bargaining strategy leaving the door open for a better offer? The following was his answer:

¹³Andrae, Tor, *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith* (Translated by Theophil Menzel, Harper and Row, N.Y., U.S.A., 1955 (Revised ed.), P. 94.

¹⁴See Joma’a, *op.cit.*, P. 557.

¹⁵*Tahtheeb Sirat Ibn Hisham*, *op.cit.*, P. 65.

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 حَمْدٌ ۙ تَنْزِیْلٌ مِّنَ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ ۙ كِتٰبٌ فُصِّلَتْ اٰیٰتُهٗ قُرْاٰنًا عَرَبِیًّا لِّعَلَّی تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝
 بَشِیْرًا وَّ نَذِیْرًا ۙ فَاَعْرَضَ اَكْثَرُهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا یَسْمَعُوْنَ ۝

“In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Ha-Meem. A revelation from (God), Most Gracious, Most Merciful; A Book whereof the verses are explained in detail; A Qur’an in Arabic, for people who understand. Giving good news and admonition: Yet most of them turn away and so they hear not”.¹⁶

In another occasion and in response to his uncle’s plea for compromise, Muhammad’s answer was as decisive and sincere, “I swear by the name of God, O Uncle!, that if they place the sun in my right-hand and the moon in my left-hand in return for giving up this matter (Islam), I will never desist until either God makes it triumph or I would perish defending it”¹⁷

History tells us that not only did Muhammad (P) and and his few followers suffer all kinds of torture and sacrifice for thirteen years, but that Muhammad (P) was about to physically perish several times because of his steadfastness.

Are these the characteristics of a power-hungry or a self-centered man? What could justify such a life of suffering and sacrifice, even after he was fully triumphant over his adversaries? What could explain the humbleness and nobility which he demonstrated in his most glorious moments when he insisted that success is due only to God’s help and not to his own genius?

V. UNCONSCIOUS FABRICATION?

So far, an impartial researcher would fail to find any ground to doubt Muhammad’s truthfulness. Ironically, some

¹⁶*Ibid.*, P. 65. Muhammad’s answer was the recitation Qur’an 41:1-38, of which the translation of the first four verses is cited above.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, P. 59.

orientalists and missionaries agree with this result. Yet, through "diplomacy", romanticism, and possibly deception, they continue to search for new ways of denying the divine origin of Islam and of attributing the Qur'an to Muhammad's own thinking. Some claim that under the influence of repeated "visions", and with his disenchantment with idol-worship, Muhammad (P), because of his pure and upright nature, gradually convinced himself that he was the reformer or savior of his people! What is overlooked in this type of theories is that Muhammad's claim of prophethood was continuously and consistently made throughout the full twenty-three years of his mission, and that it was not something that gradually developed or felt. It was rather a claim that came up unexpectedly at the age of forty.

What kind of a person is he who "convinces himself" for twenty-three years that his *fabricated* claim of receiving revelation from God is only an outcome of his *sincere* desire to help his people? A person like this would have to be notoriously dishonest or notoriously sick mentally. As it became too difficult to show objectively any proof of dishonesty, fishing in the troubled waters continued by seeking explanation in epilepsy.

EPILEPSY? :

It was contended, and still is, perhaps to a lesser extent, that Muhammad (P) was a sincere but epileptic person who, during his epileptic seizures recited what became later on, the Qur'an.

What is overlooked in this argument is that during the epileptic seizure, the functioning of the brain is disturbed. As such, sensible speech is not possible since the patient usually mumbles confusing words which he forgets after he is recovered. From all available accounts on Muhammad's life, we consistently find a man with excellent physical and mental health throughout his life, a man who never had epileptic seizures, or the "falling-down" disease that was known to his contemporaries, and a man who faced many critical moments in his life without collapsing, even once,

under tension or strain, no matter how great.

Are these the characteristics of an epileptic man? How could his followers including the most wise and intelligent,¹⁸ believe in him rather than seek a cure for him? Did the believers in this “epilepsy” school of thought bother to open the Qur’an, read it, and see if it looks like a product of epileptic convulsive seizures?

THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION:

If no reasonable argument can be made to support the imputation of dishonesty and fabrication on Muhammad (P), and if the implicit assumption of fabrication, while seeking psychological explanations for his claim, is only self-contradictory, what other reasons may justify the denial of the divine origin of his message, or to doubt his truthfulness?¹⁹

VI. JUDAO-CHRISTIAN ORIGINS OF ISLAM?

In orientalist and missionary literature on Islam, there is often some explicit mention or implicit implication that Islam is compiled from Judaism, Christianity or both. This is done by pointing out to obvious parallels between Islam and either or both Judaism and Christianity. It is also contended, without sufficient evidence, that it was through Muhammad’s contacts with Jews and Christians, especially during his travels, that he learned about religious beliefs and theology. It was this background, they claim, that led Muhammad (P) to formulate his new religion. The clear implication of statements of this kind is to impute dishonesty on him when he claimed that he did not compile Islam from any source whatsoever except for the revelation he received from God. The

¹⁸For example, Abu-Bakr, Omar, Osman, Ali, Talha, Al-Zubair, Ibn-al-Awwam, Saad Ibn Abi-Waqqas, and Abul-Rahman Ibn Auf.

¹⁹Unless one rejects all religions based on divine revelations, which is not the typical attitudes of Muhammad’s critics, some of whom are missionaries!

soundness of this assumption was discussed at some length in the preceding pages. It would be interesting, however, to look further into this issue. None of those who subscribe to the theory of "Judaeo-Christian origins" of Islam could present any *conclusive* historical evidence about the alleged teacher (s) of Muhammad (P). Their claim thus qualifies only as an assertion or an assumption but not as a factual statement. By sheer repetition and wide circulation, however, this mere assertion and the far-reaching judgements based on it were "elevated to the dignity of facts";²⁰ a settled issue.

One example of such inaccuracy which disregards the ABC of scientific spirit of inquiry is a statement by Montgomery Watt in his *Islam and Integration of Society*: "Islam would have to admit the *fact* of its *origin* the historical influence of Judaeo-Christian religious traditions".²¹ Commenting on this an historian says: "Here the question of (origins) is taken as settled and referred to as a (fact) without any qualification or discussion".²² If the question of Muhammad's truthfulness was subjected to such a critical investigation, then it is only logical to critically and fairly look at the assertion of the Judaeo-Christian origins of Islam.

At least three questions may shed light on this issue:

(1) What was Muhammad's background and education before he started his mission at the age of forty, and to what extent could such background have resulted in what he brought forth?

(2) What was the extent of his "contacts" with Jews and Christians, and to what extent could such contacts have resulted in the faith he proclaimed?

(3) Analytically speaking, how far can the Judaeo-

²⁰Tibawi, A.L. *English Speaking Orientalist*, The Islamic Centre, Geneva, Switzerland, 1965, P. 17.

²¹Watt, W. Montgomery, *Islam and the Integration of Society*, London, 1961, P. 263 cited in Tibawi, Op.cit., P. 22. Emphasis are mine.

²²Tabawi, op. cit., P. 22.

Christian thought be traced in what Muhammed (P) taught? And if there is any similarities between both teachings, how could that be explained?

(1) **The Question of Background:** Historically speaking, Muhammad (P) was an illiterate man. There is no evidence that he knew how to read or write. Even the Qur'an, which he stated was the Word of God, was not written down by him but he dictated it to the "scribes of revelation" who wrote it down and committed it to memory. Another historical document which is still available is the letter sent by Muhammad (P) to the ruler of Egypt inviting him to accept Islam.²³ This letter written for Muhammad (P) carries his seal rather than his signature. Besides the lack of significant education, formal or otherwise, religious or secular, there is no account in his life, until the age of forty, that shows his scholarly tendencies or achievements in any of the spectrum of subjects with which the Qur'an deals. How could such an illiterate man, suddenly, at the age of forty, bring about an ideological and religious revolution that changed the face of history?

(2) **The Question of Environment:** As we looked into the man's background, we may as well look into the type of environment in which he was reared in order to see the extent of his possible exposure to Judaeo-Christian thought. Unlike Moses (P) who was reared in a center of learning and civilization, and unlike Jesus (P) and other Israelite prophets who emerged in the center of Judaism, if not in the religious hierarchy²⁴ itself, Muhammad (P) was raised in a predominantly pagan society with no significant Jewish or Christian population. Yathrib (Medina), where some Jewish tribes lived, was too far to be considered as part of Muhammad's

²³This document was reproduced in *Newsletter*, the Muslim Students' Association of the U.S. & Canada, Vol. 5, No. 3, Jan. 1971, P. 10.

²⁴These facts, however, do not justify the denial of the divine origin of the *original* revelations given to Prophets Moses and Jesus (may peace be upon them). Such denial is much less justified in the case of Muhammad (P). See Joma'a, *op.cit.*, P.P. 547-549.

immediate environment, especially when the seventh century means of transportation and communication are considered.

Some may assert, however, that through his travels with the caravans, Muhammad (P) might have learned about Judaism and Christianity. The danger in a statement like this is not in its theoretical possibility. The danger lies instead in the hasty and superficial conclusions that are often based on it. Assuming that Muhammad (P) met some Jews and Christians during his travels, or when the latter visited Mecca, which is a fair assumption, what was the extent of his exposure to their teachings? Was such an exposure sufficient to raise reasonable doubts that he copied or compiled the Qur'an from their scriptures?

Historically speaking, and inspite of the reasonable details about Muhammad's life, there is evidence of two travels that Muhammad (P) made, both to Syria. In one trip, he accompanied his uncle as a twelve year old boy. Would it be reasonable to assume that during such a trip, a twelve year old boy would learn all the high concepts of theology which were at that time the exclusive knowledge of high priests? In the second trip, Muhammad (P) was twenty-five years old, and he was leading Khadija's caravan.²⁵ It would be highly imaginary to say that through his occasional chats with Jews and Christians, while busy with his caravan, Muhammad (P) learned enough about either or both religions to formulate a new powerful and viable religion, a task that defies the collective efforts of scholars for centuries. Furthermore, the above assertion does not provide answers to the following questions:

(1) Why is it, that inspite of the abundance of historical material on Muhammad's life, and inspite of the extensive research on his life for centuries by his severe critics, why was it not possible to discover that mysterious teacher (s)through whom Muhammad (P) might have learned all that?

(2) It is known that Muhammad (P) was opposed.

²⁵For an account of these two travels see *Tahtheeb Sirat Ibn-Hisham*, op.cit., P.P. 42-46.

ridiculed, and persecuted for nearly thirteen years by his own contemporaries. With this magnitude of severe enemies, was it not possible for them to prove to the masses that Muhammad's claim of revelation was sheer fabrication? Was it not possible for them to reveal and name what they alleged to be the human source or sources of his teachings?²⁶ Even some of his adversaries who made this assertion changed their minds later on and accused him, instead, of magic or of being possessed by evil... etc.

(3) Muhammad was raised among his people and every aspect of his life was exposed to them, especially by the openness that characterizes tribal life in the desert.²⁷ How could the multitudes of his contemporaries, including many of his close relatives who knew him so well, – how could they believe in his truthfulness if they had any doubt that he was claiming credit for ideas taught to him by some other teachers without bothering to give them credit?

(4) What kind of teacher might have taught Muhammad (P) a coherent and complete religion that changed the face of history? Why didn't he claim the credit for himself? Why couldn't he or they (if any) speak against the alleged student who continued learning from them, while ignoring them and claiming some other divine source for his teachings?

(5) How could many Jews and Christians amongst his contemporaries become Muslims and believe in his truthfulness if they knew that he was copying from their scriptures or learning from their priests or rabbis?

(6) It is known that some of the Qur'anic revelations came to Muhammad (P) in the presence of people. The Qur'an was revealed on the span of twenty-three years, where then was that mysterious, perhaps invisible human teacher of Muhammad? How could he have hidden himself for so long? Or how could Muhammad (P) who was constantly surrounded by his followers, how was he able to make frequent secret

²⁶See Joma'a, op.cit., P. 556.

²⁷Addressing the disbelievers of Muhammad's contemporaries, the Qur'an states "Or do they not recognize their messenger, that they deny him."

visits to that mysterious teacher or teachers for twenty-three years without being caught even once?

If Muhammad were an able theologian with a score of Ph.D's from Oxford, Harvard, and McGill, it would be impossible to believe that the Qur'an is the outcome of this background. The fact that Muhammad was an illiterate man reared up in a predominantly pagan and backward society, makes the above assertion a ridiculous one.

(3) **The Question of Parallels:** Many orientalist, especially those with missionary affiliation, have been busy comparing the Qur'an with the Bible, trying to "discover" parallels between both books to show the *influence* of the Bible or the *influence* of "Judaean-Christian thought" on Islam. Those scholars seem to ignore that methodologically speaking, the similarity between any two compositions is not sufficient to infer that one of them copied from the other. Both composition may be based on a third common source.²⁸ A Muslim may state that all divine revelations came from the same source, the One Universal God. No matter what human changes were introduced into some of these revelations that might have distorted their originality, there is bound to be some areas that remained free from distortion and thus are common to many religions. It is true that there are some parallels between the Qur'an and the Bible, e.g., some basic moral laws. If these parallels are sufficient to accuse Muhammad (P) of compiling or copying from the Bible, then the same logic should be impartially and consistently applied to all previous Scriptures as well. For example, there are similarities between the teachings of Christianity and Judaism. Is this sufficient to infer that Jesus (P) was not a genuine Prophet and that he simply copied from the Old Testament? Moreover, there are similarities between the Judaic teachings and other older religions such as Hinduism (e.g. in moral laws); is this sufficient to infer that Moses (P) and all other Israelite prophets were false prophets and that they simply compiled their teachings from Hindu and other

²⁸Tibawi, op.cit., P. 20.

sources, rather than receive genuine revelations from God? These would be “heroic” inferences in the cases of Judaism and Christianity, as they are in the case of Islam.

BEYOND THE SURFACE:

From the above discussion, it does not seem necessary to argue that there are no similarities between Islam and other religions. It is certainly unfair and inaccurate to say so. All divine revelations proceeded from the One Universal God of all. Even with human distortions throughout history, some parallels are bound to exist.

It is important to point out, however, that there are many essential differences that further refute the “Judaic-Christian origins” thesis. Such differences cover a wide spectrum of topics including the concept of “original sin”, the necessity of blood sacrifice, atonement of one’s sins by someone else, the question of intermediary between man and God, the necessity and authority of a religious hierarchy, the concept of Sabbath, the concept of prophethood, essential informations about previous prophets, the presence of or absence of inherent conflict between material and spirit, body and soul, the conception of man’s role on earth, and the meaning of “religion” and whether it is basically a spiritual aspect of man’s life or the totality of man’s life. Discussion of such differences could extend to almost any length. For brevity, however, a few citations from the Bible and the Qur’an on one essential topic, the Concept of God, may help shed some light on such differences.

A. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF GOD:

(1) God is depicted in a human form. In the book of Genesis we read: “And God said, Let us make a man in our image, after our likeness”.²⁹

(2) He is described as one who gets tired of work and who needs to rest: “And on the seventh day God ended his

²⁹Genesis 1:26, See also Gen. 9:6.

work which he had made: and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made".³⁰

(3) He is described as one who walks in the garden, one from whom man may hide, and one who needs to search for what he is looking for. Narrating what happened after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree the Bible states: "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "where art you?" And he said, 'I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself'. He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?' "³¹

(4) He is described as One who becomes sorry for making certain decisions which may imply either that he was not aware of the future repercussions of his decisions or that he is subject to different moods. In the Bible we read: "And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart".³²

(5) He is described frequently as the God of Israel and as one who is jealous. In the Book of Exodus we read: "For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God".³³

Although the Bible describes God as the Creator of heavens and earth, there is far less emphasis on Him as the Universal God of all nations and more emphasis on Him as the "God of Israel". children of Israel are frequently depicted as "His people".

(6) In general, He is depicted as one who is subject to human-like limitations, as one who has nostrils and a

³⁰Gen. 2:2, See also Gen. 2:3 and Exodus 20:11. For forgetfulness see Gen. 8:1 and Exodus 2:24.

³¹Gen. 3: 8-11.

³²Gen. 6:6, See also Judges 2:18 and Exodus 32:14.

³³Exodus 34:14, See also Exodus 20:5.

mouth³⁴, that he dwells in thick darkness.³⁵ He is described as one who needs man's guidance as it is clear in his instructions for the Israelite's flight from Egypt.³⁶ He is described as one who worries about man's power and unity. The following citation document this latter point:

“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down; and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech’. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord Scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth”.³⁷

B. THE QUR'ANIC CONCEPT OF GOD:

(1) In contrast to the conception of God in a human form we read in the Qur'an: “Say He is God, The One and Only God, the Eternal, Absolute. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him”.³⁸ Also “...there is nothing comparable to Him!”³⁹

(2) In contrast to the conception of God as One who gets tired and needs rest, we read in the Qur'an:

“God, there is no god except Him, the Living, the Eternal. Slumber does not overtake Him, nor does Sleep.”⁴⁰

³⁴2nd Samuel 22:9-15.

³⁵1Kings 8:12, See also Numbers 11:25.

³⁶Exodus 12:13.

³⁷Gen. 11:5-9, See also Gen. 3:22-24.

³⁸Qur'an 112:1-4.

³⁹Qur'an 42:11.

⁴⁰Qur'an 2:255.

(3) In contrast to the conception of God as One who walks, resides in the clouds or in the temple of Solomon, the Qur'an indicates that God is not subject to the limitations of time and space. We read in the Qur'an:

"The East and West are God's. Wherever you may turn, there is God's countenance [Presence.] God is so Ample, Aware."⁴¹

"And He is God in the heavens and on earth. He knows what you hide, and what you reveal..."⁴²

(4) In contrast to the conception of God as One who discovers the consequences of his decisions as time goes on, the Qur'an emphasises that God's knowledge are as eternal and as infinite as His Presence: We read in the Qur'an:

"...He knows what is before them and what is behind them and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases..."⁴³

"He holds the keys to the unseen; only He knows them! He knows everything on land and at sea; no leaf drops down unless He knows it, nor any seed in the darkness of the earth, nor any tender shoot nor any dry [stalk] unless it is in a plain book".⁴⁴

(5) In contrast to the conception of God as the Jealous God of Israel, one fails to find a single verse in the Qur'an in which God is, described as the God of Qurashites, the God of Arabs, or the God of Muslims. On the contrary we read in the Qur'an:

"Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe..."⁴⁵

"...We have sent you [O Muhammad] as a messenger to mankind; God suffices as a witness".⁴⁶

(6) In contrast of the Conception of God in a human-

⁴¹Qur'an 2:115.

⁴²Qur'an 6:3.

⁴³Qur'an 2:255.

⁴⁴Qur'an 6:59.

⁴⁵Qur'an 1:1.

⁴⁶Qur'an 4:79.

like form, a conception which is too explicit to think of it as only symbolic (See #6 under Biblical Concept), one fails to find similar descriptions in the Qur'an. Whenever it was necessary for communication purposes to describe God in what may seem to be a physical description, we find that the terms used in the Qur'an are clearly figurative. For example, using the term throne of God or His Seat to refer to authority and power. Also the use of the word "hand" in using an expression like "The Hands of God is above their hands"⁴⁷ – refers to power or will. The proper meaning of such terms is clearly understood by referring to the Qur'an itself: "Nothing is comparable to Him [God]".⁴⁸

Such clearly figurative descriptions are hardly analogous to the Biblical anthropomorphism, e.g., saying that God created man in His own image, that He walks in the garden causing noise as He walks, One who rests, One from Whose mouth devouring fire went up, or One who came down with thick darkness under His feet.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

This brief exposition is not intended to over-emphasise the differences between Islam and the "Judaeo-Christian" traditions. Nor does it imply that there is nothing in common between Islam and other religions, Judaism, Christianity, or other religions. Such an inference would clearly contradict the Islamic theory of the history of "religions". Such a theory can be summarized as follows: All authentic divine revelations proceeded from the same Universal God of all. As such, authentic and original teachings of all messengers of God must have been essentially the same. Slight differences might have existed but only in detailed rites and regulations. As time went on, authentic and original teachings of various prophets were lost, changed, or intermingled with philosophical and theological interpretations to the extent that

⁴⁷Qur'an 48:10.

⁴⁸Qur'an 42:11.

⁴⁹See for example 2 Samuel 22:1-15.

even the concept of God was given various contradictory explanations ranging from attributing divinity to trees, stars, animals, Spirits, or even human beings (e.g. Buddha and Jesus "P"). It was by God's grace that His eternal message to humanity was perfected and purified from all alien elements, presented in its pristine form to humanity at large, not any more to be subject to any loss or change. Such is the universal, eternal, divine, purified, and perfected message that Muhammad (P) brought to humanity.

The fact that God has chosen an illiterate Arab, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian, to carry this noble message does, by no means, justify the tremendous energies spent by Jewish or Christian orientalist or missionaries to belittle his mission by all means. Nor does it justify the distortions, unfairness, and lack of objectivity in what amounts to be an attempt to impute dishonesty on the noble characters of Muhammad (P) directly, or indirectly, openly or "diplomatically".

Any fair and logical study of Muhammad's history and characters would leave no room to doubt of any ulterior motive to fabricate his claim of prophethood and divine revelation. It does not stand to reason to say that the book (the Qur'an), that caused a far-reaching spiritual, moral, social, economical, and political revolution that changed the course of history, was a product of convulsive epileptic seizures! Nor does it stand reason to say that this book was a product of a simple and illiterate desert dweller! The brief discussion of the so-called "Judaean Origins", "Christian Origins" or "Judaean-Christian Origins" of Islam, even in one single topic is only self-explanatory.

What then holds an honest and open-minded seeker for truth from admitting the Divine source of Islam?

Does it seem too much for the "rational" and "scientific" mind to accept the concept of divine revelation?

It would perhaps be plausible if those who denied Muhammad's truthfulness were all atheists, since divine revelation in their view is all superstition. It is hardly plausible to see devout Jewish or Christian orientalist and missionaries,

whose own faith is based on divine revelation, trying by all means to dismiss the desert dweller's claim of prophethood, although his life and character leave no reason to doubt his sincerity and truthfulness.

Might it not be better for humanity to turn to its loving Creator, receive his universal message to humanity, with no prejudice or cynicism, to reflect on it, and implement it in man's life. Could that bring about unity, happiness, and peace to our conflict-torn world?

سنة ١٤١٥

المكتب العربي - استراليا
بانتارو دار الأمانة - كورنوال - أستراليا
مكتب المقتنين العالمين

تصديق

الحمد لله وحده والصلاة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده محمد وآله
وصحبه وبعد

فإن المكتب النضالي للدعوة والإرشاد وتوعية الجاليات بمرتب الصبر
بالرياض بطرح جمهور مشكور في دعوات الجاليات وتعليمهم الإسلام بطرح عليه
مصرحة من المشايخ اللغات المعروفين لدى وحرص على حياطة ساسة لدعم والمؤازرة
فأرجو من يطلع عليه احتساب الأجر في دعم المكتب المذكور باهره من غير
الركا - ولا يخلو ما في هذا الأسر واليهما من الأبرار الصابرين والقراب
الجميل نليل الله من الجميع ، والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

مضى عاد نسلك العربية استراليا
رئيس هيئة كبار العلماء - باندرا البحر العربية والإفتاء
عبد العزيز بن عبد الله بن باز



سنة ١٤١٥

أولاً: إن المكتب العربي للدعوة والإرشاد وتوعية الجاليات بمرتب الصبر
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دعوات الجاليات
عبد العزيز بن عبد الله بن باز

**نبوة
محمد**

ﷺ

باللغة الإنجليزية

تأليف
د. جمال بدوي

أخي المسلم

إن طباعة الكتب النافعة والأشرطة المفيدة
من أفضل وسائل الدعوة إلى الله تعالى وأكثرها انتشاراً
فساهم معنا بما تستطيعه لدعم هذا الخير العظيم.

حساب الكتب ٤/٩٣٤٠