

ISLAM
AND
CHRISTIANITY

By
Mrs. ULFAT AZIZ-US-SAMAD
(English Department University of Peshawar)

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

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INTRODUCTION

The Muslim approach to Comparative Religion is quite different from the Christian approach.

The Christian is brought up to believe that his religion is the only true one, with Judaism as a preparation for Christianity, and that all other religions are false. He thinks that God has chosen and set apart the children of Israel for the Purpose of revealing His Messages and sending His Prophets. And so, he believes only in the Prophets and religious teachers of Israel and looks upon all other claimants to prophethood as impostors. Christian missionaries have all along employed their energies at Proving the holy founders of other religions to be false and wicked men, so that they might establish the unique claim of Jesus Christ. One has only to read their books about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and his religion to find how their religious Preconceptions and prejudices have made them incapa-

ble of seeing the truth of others. They have not hesitated even to mistranslate the Holy Qur'an and spread many misstatements about the Prophet Muhammad to serve their own purpose. If they find anything in another religion resembling some thing in their own, instead of feeling happy, they feel discouraged and hasten to explain it away as due to Christian influence.

The Muslim, on the other hand, believes in the divine origin of all the great religions of the world. The Sacred book of Islam declares that God has raised Prophets in every nation to guide the people to the path of truth and righteousness. Being the loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds. He cannot become partial and choose one nation to the exclusion of all others for revealing His Messages. A Muslim must believe in the founders of all the great religions. He may feel sorry to see how the Jews and the Christians have in part forsaken and altered the

true teachings of Moses and Jesus, but he can never speak against the holy Prophets of those religions. For, he has been directed by the Holy Qur'an to believe in them as true. and righteous Prophets of God. He has the same respect and love for them as he has for Prophet Muhammad.

It is, therefore, with a feeling of profound love and respect for both Jesus and Muhammad, and for the religions which they preached, that I embark upon a comparative study of Islam and Christianity. If at times I find myself disagreeing with the Christians, it is not over the religion of Jesus, but over the altered shape and, features that it developed after the departure of Christ. In the words of Lord Headley, Islam and Christianity. as taught by Christ him self, are sister religions, only held apart by dogmas and technicalities which might very well be dispensed with.

* Lord Headley : A Western Awakening to Islam, P.15

CHAPTER I

THE GOSPTL AND THE QURIAN

Both Christianity and Islam claim to be revealed religions. Jesus Christ declared that the Message he was delivering was not his but God's : "I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12 : 49). He described himself as "A man that hath, told you the truth, which I have heard of Cod" (John 8 : 40). In the same way it is claimed in the Qur'an that the revelation which came to Prophet Muhammad was from the Lord of the worlds: "And lo it (i.e., the Qur'an) is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds, which the True Spirit hath brought down upon thy heart (O Muhammad), that thou mayest be one of the warners" (the Qur'an 26 : 192-194). From this it follows that the truth of either religion depends on the accuracy with which the inspired words of its founder

have been recorded and on the textual purity of its Scripture. If the Message which was revealed by God to a Prophet has not reached us exactly as it was delivered, but has been misreported and altered, then to that extent that religion may be regarded as having deviated from truth. In this chapter we shall see how far the inspired words and revelations of Jesus and Muhammad have been faithfully recorded in the Gospels the Qur'an respectively, and how far these Scriptures have remained free from alteration or interpolation of any kind.

Composition & Character of the Gospels

There are four Gospels included in the Bible the Gospels according to Matthew Mark, Luke and John. We come across many inspired saying of Jesus in these Gospels. They were composed between forty and eighty years after the departure of Jesus on the basis of some earlier documents which are now lost. Biblical scholars have identi-

fied some of these earlier documents as (1) Q (German Quelle = 'Source'), a lost document in Aramaic, which reached the writers of the Gospels in a Greek translation, (2) ('Urmarcus' = Primitive Mark) an earlier draft of Mark's Gospel written on the basis of Peter's discourses about Jesus, and (3) 'L' a collection of reports about Jesus used only by Luke. A comparison of the Gospels will show that their authors used these lost documents in a somewhat free manner, they did not even hesitate to change some things contained in to suit their own purpose.

The first Gospel to be written was that of Mark. It was written at Rome at least forty years after the so-called crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospel as we have it today is considered to be an expanded version of Urmarcus, about which Papias, an early Christian writer, has the following to say:

The elder John used to say, Mark having become

Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related saying or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord accompanied him, but subsequently as I said attached himself to Peter who used to frame his teaching to meet the wants of his hearers, and not as making a connected narrative of the Lord's discourses. "1

It is not possible to say whether Urmarcus was expanded and revised to give us the Gospel of Mark as we have it by Mark himself or by some other person, Dr. C.J. Cadoux, who was Mackennal Professor of Church History at Oxford, thus sums up the conclusions of eminent Biblical scholars regarding the nature and composition of this Gospel:

1 Roberts and Donaldson (editors), *The Ante-Nicene*
Vo. I, pp. 154, 155.

“It was written after Peter's martyrdom (65 A. D.), and at a time when Mark, who had not himself been a disciple of Jesus, apparently had none of the personal disciples of Jesus within reach by whose knowledge he could check his narrative.

These circumstances of its composition account for the existence in it, side by side, of numerous signs of accuracy and a certain number of signs of ignorance and inaccuracy.”¹

The Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek at Antioch about 90 C. E. The author made use of at least two lost documents - 'Q' and 'Urmarcus'. No independent scholar regards this Gospel as the work of Matthew the apostle of Jesus. If Matthew composed anything it must have been only 'Q'. Regarding the liberties taken by the unknown author of this Gospel with the original material, C.J. Cadoux writes:

¹ C.J. Cadoux : The Life of Jesus Penguin Books, P. 13

"But a close examination of the treatment he gives to his borrowings from Mark shows that he allowed himself great freedom in editing and embroidering his material in the interest of what he regarded as the rightful honouring of the great Master. The same tendencies are often visible elsewhere when he is producing 'Q' or providing matter peculiar to himself. Anything, therefore, strictly peculiar to 'Matthew' can be accepted as historical only with great caution."I

The third Gospel, the Gospel of Luke, was written somewhere in Greece about the year 80 C.E. for the benefit of "the most excellent" Theophilus, probably a high official of the Roman Empire. It is an apologetic addressed to non-Jews. The writer, who was the friend and travel-companion of St. Paul, made use of at least lost documents, two of these were identical with those used by the writer of Matthew's Gospel and the third was peculiar to himself.

1. C.J. Cadoux : The Life of Jesus, Penguin Books, pp. 14.15

Luke, who wished to bring his Gospel in line with the Pauline point of view, took even greater liberties with his sources than the writer of Matthew's Gospel had done.

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke are called "the Synoptic Gospels" because they proceed on the basis of the same lost document and have much in common. The Gospel of John is very different from these. The divinity and pre-existence of Jesus are affirmed in this Gospel alone, though never as a claim put forward by Jesus himself. In the opening lines the writer of this Gospel makes the claim that the divine Logos, the Word or Reason of God, which created the world, had become incarnate in Jesus. The Gospel of John was written at or near Ephesus between the years 110 and 115 of the Christian era by some unknown writer who was anti-semitically inclined and represented the Jews as the enemies of Jesus Christ. No independent scholar re-

gards it as the work of John the So. of Zebedee, who, according to R. H. Charles, Alfred Loisy, Robert Eisler, and other scholars, was beheaded by Agrippa I in the year 44 C.E., long before the Fourth Gospel was written. Modern Biblical scholars doubt the genuineness not only of the writer's own views expressed in this Gospel, but also of the words put by him in the mouth of Jesus Christ. C. J. Cadoux'writes :

"The speeches in the Fourth Gospel (even apart from the early messianic claim) are so different from those in the Synoptics, and so like the comments of the Fourth Evangelist both cannot be equally reliable as records of what Jesus said : Literary veracity in ancient times did forbid, as it does now, the assigning of fictitious speeches to historical characters: the best ancient historians made a practice of and assigning such speeches in this way."I

1. C.J. Cadoux: The Life of Jesus, p. 16.

The Unreliability i the Gospels

The, Gospels were composed after the early had become divided into different factions. They fact composed to propogat, the special teachings various schools and their authors showed no hesitation in tampering with the earlier documents and other traditional material regardig the life and teaching of Jesus to bring them in line with the views of their schools. Rev. T.G. Tucker writes:

"Thus Gospels were produced which clearly reflect the conception of the practical needs of the community for which they were written. In them the traditional material was used, but there was no hesitation in altering it or making additions to it, or in leaving out what did not suit the writer's purpose"1.

The four Gospels included in the Bible were not the only Gospels written in the early centuries of Christianity.

1. T.G. Tucker : The History of the Christians in the Light of Modern Knowledge, p.320

There were many others, including the one called "The Gospels according to the Hebræes", an Aramaic work which was used by the Nazarenes (as the early disciples of Jesus were called), who denied the divinity of Jesus and regarded him only as a great prophet. Towards the end of the second century the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John

were included in the Canon and the rest were declared to be heretical and accepted as scriptures, the Gospels did not have that sanctity which they have now and no one felt any compunction in altering them if anything contained in them did not suit his purpose or the purpose of his sect. Even after they were included in the Canon and declared to be the Word of God, changes continued to be made in them, as is clear from the different early extant manuscripts. Referring to this, Professor Dummelow of Cambridge writes in his famous Commentary on the Holy Bible:

"A copyist would sometimes put in not what was in the text, but what he thought ought to be in it, He would trust a fickle memory, or he would make the text accord with the views of the school to which he belonged. In addition to the versions and quotations from the Christian Fathers, nearly four thousand Greek

MSS of the Testament, were known to exist. As the variety of reading is considerable."I

In considering how far the four Canonical Gospels faithfully present the inspired message or Gospel of Jesus we must bear the following facts in mind: (1) that no written copy was made of the inspired sayings of Jesus in his life time;(2) that the earliest records of the saying of Jesus, which were made shortly after the departure of Jesus, when the glorification of Jesus had already begun, have all been irretrievably lost; (3) that in the Gospels, which were ten between

1. J.R. Dummelow: Commentary on the Holy Bible, P.16.

70 and 115 C.E. on the basis of some of those lost documents, the material contained in the. was handled rather freely, the Gospel-writers feeling no hesitation in changing it for what they considered to be the greater glory of Christ or to bring it in line with the views of their sector; (4) that none of the Evangelists had known Jesus or heard him speaking; (5) that the Gospels were written in Greek, whereas the language spoken by Jesus was Aramaic; (6) that they were composed to propagate the points of view of the different factions and that they were chosen from many others which represented different view-points; (7) that for at least a century after they were written they had no canonical authority and could be and were actually changed by the copiers of the different sects to serve their own purpose; (8) that the earliest extant manuscripts of the Gospels —

Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Alexandrinus—belong to the fourth and fifth century,

and no one knows how much the Gospels had been changed during the centuries in which no manuscript is available; (9) that there are considerable differences at many places among the various extant manuscripts of the fourth and fifth century; and (10) that the Gospels taken as a whole are full of contradictions.

These facts disclosed by distinguished Western scholars go to show that the Gospel of Jesus, by which we mean the Message which Jesus had received from God, has not reached us in its original form. The four Gospels included in the Bible cannot be considered identical with the inspired Gospel of Jesus. The manner of their composition and the circumstances through which they have passed are such that they cannot be relied upon to give us exact knowledge of what Jesus had said and taught. C.J. Cadoux sums up the position in these words in his book *Life of Jesus*.

“In the four Gopels, therefore, the main documents to which we must go if we are to fill-out at all that bare sketch which we can Put together from other sources, we find material of widely-differing quality as regards credibility. So far-reaching is the element of ucertainly that it is temptig to ‘down tools’ at once, and to declare the task hopeless. The historical inconsistencies and impobabilities in parts of the Gospels form some of arguments advanced in favour of the Christ-myth theory. These are, however, entirely out-weighed as we have shown-by ther considerations. Still, the discrepancies and uncertainties that remain are serious and consequently many moderns, who have no doubt whatever of Jesus’ real existence, regard as hopeless any attempt to dissolve out the historically-true from the legendary or mythical matter which the Gospels contain, and to recostruct the story of Jesus’ mission out of the more historical residue.”¹

1. C.J. Cadou: op. cit., pp.16,17.

The Authenticity of the Quran.

On the other hand, there is no such doubt about the Holy Quran. It contains nothing but the revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad. The revelations came to him in fragments, from time to time. As soon as he received any, he used to communicate it to his disciples and ask them not only to commit it to memory, but also to write it down. On each such occasion he indicated in a precise place to which the revelation belonged. Thus the plebeians of Quraysh were committed to writing and also preserve the hearts of hundreds of persons in the life time of the Prophet.

After the passing away of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, charged Zaid ibn Thabit with the task of preparing an authentic copy of a book. The companions of the Holy Prophet had written the revelations that had come to the Prophet on parchments or pieces of leather. Zaid ibn Thabit collected all these and, after comparing them with what the fol-

woers of the Prophet had learnt by heart, compiled a copy, called Mus'haf (bound leaves), about the genuineness or correctness of which there was absolutely no doubt.

At the order of Usman, the third Caliph, seven copies of the Mus'haf edition of the Holy Quran, again confirmed by the memory of those who had learnt it by heart (hafiz) were prepared and sent to the different centres of the vast Islamic world. One of these seven copies is still in existence in Tashkent. The Czarist government of Russia had published it with a facsimile reproduction; and we see that there is complete identity between this copy and the text otherwise in use all over the world. The same is true of the other extant MSS of the Quran, complete or fragmentary, dating from the first century of the Muslim era.

From the time of the Prophet to our own time the practice of learning the whole of the Quran by heart

has continued unbroken, and the number of haffaz can now be Counted in tle world by hundreds of thousands. The result is that no scholar, Eastern of Western, Muslim or non-Muslim, has ever cast any doubt on the purity of the text of the Holy Ouran. Even such an unfriendly critic as Sir William Muir writes about the Ouran : "There is probably in the world no other book which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text."I

1. Sir William Muir, The Life of Mohamed. Introduction, p.18

CHAPTER 2

JESUS AND MUHAMMAD

Nothing brings out the contrast between Islam and Christianity so much as a comparison between the Islamic attitude towards Jesus and the Christian attitude towards Muhammad. For, while Muslims believe in Jesus as a great Prophet of God and love and respect him as they love and respect the Prophet Muhammad, the Christians not only reject Muhammad, but are never tired of speaking of him in the most disparaging manner possible.

An impartial study of their lives will, however, show that the founders of Islam and Christianity were both godly men, completely dedicated to the task of preaching God's religion, of delivering men from error and sin and making, the Will of God prevail in the world.

The Life and Mission of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ was born about 7-5 B.C. in a humble home in Palestine. Very little is known about the early years of his life. All we can say, in the words of Luke, is that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men". When he was between thirty-three and thirty-five years of age, a prophet appeared in Palestine preaching "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin." The name of this Prophet was John the Baptist, and Jesus went to him and was baptized by him. It was at that moment that it was revealed to Jesus that he had been chosen by God as the Messiah of the Jews to revive the true religion and bring to completion the long line of Israelite prophets.

The religion of God was not unknown to the children of Israel, but at the time when Jesus began his ministry, the spirit of true religion had been stifled by the wordiness of the Sadducees and the formal-

ism and trivial legalism of the Pharisees. They declared, in the words of the Talmud, "He who lightly esteems handwashing will perish from the earth. "And Jesus rebuked them, saying, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. "They had absurd rules about the Sabbath. For instance, a man might walk two thousand cubits on the Sabbath, but no more. Vinegar, if allowed, could be used to a sore throat, but it could not be gargled. In case death threatened, a physician could be summoned, but a fracture should not be attended to on the Sabbath. Jesus impatiently brushed aside all such elaborate and artificial regulations, He told them that the Sabbath was for man and not man for the Sabbath, and he warned them. " Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith... Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat,

and swallow a camel”.

The essence of his religion was the love of God and the love of fellow-men, which he tried to instill into the hearts of his people by means of his inspired sermons and beautiful parables.

The Sadducees and Pharisees, instead of acknowledging him as the Messiah about whose coming the earlier Israelite prophets had given the good news, turned his mortal enemies and pressed the Roman Procurator to pass sentence of crucifixion on him.

This man who was treated as a common malefactor by his blind people was one of the most inspiring characters of history. He led a pure, noble and godly life. He showed a rare combination of mildness and courage in doing the Will of God and in dealing with his misguided compatriots. He was all gentleness, selflessness and humility, serving his friends and praying for his enemies, He worked many wonders, yet never took pride in them, ascribing them al-

ways to the same. His compassion for the sinners and sufferers was truly admirable. About him it may well be said that he conquered the devil.

The Prophecies of Jesus About Muhammad

The crime of the Jews against Jesus deprived them of God's blessings and favours. Jesus told them that after him

no prophet would appear among them and that the Kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to a nation more worthy of it. Moreover, he announced that the stone which the builders had rejected, the same had been chosen by God to become the corner-stone. Meaning thereby that the children of Ishmael, whom the children of Israel had rejected and disowned, had been chosen by God for his greatest blessings the World-Prophet would appear from among the Ishmaelites. Jesus gave the prophecy of his coming in no uncertain terms:

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye

cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”

(John 16 : 12, 13)

In a non-canonical Gospel, the Gospel of St. Barnabas, Jesus mentions the spirit of truth or the Comforter - The Prophet who was to come after him to guide the world "into all truth" - by name thus.

“Then said the Priest, 'How shall the Comforter called, and what signs shall reveal his coming ?' Jesus answered, 'The name of the Comforter is Admirable, for God gave him the name when he had created his soul, and placed it in Celestial Splendour. God said : 'Wait Mohammad, for thy sake I wil create paradise, the world, and a great multitude of creatures, whereof I make thee a present in so much that who so shall bless thee shall be blessed, and whose shall curse thee shall be cursed. When I shall send thee into the world, I shall send thee as My Messenger of salvation, and thy word shall be true, in so

much that haven and earth shall fail, but thy faith shall never fail.' Mohammad is hi, blessed name. Then the crowd lifted up their voice saying: O God, send us Thy Messenger. O! Mohammad, come quickly for the salvation of the world." I

The Prophet Muliammad

The Coirforter, the Spirit of truth, the Messenger of God about whose coming Jesus had given the good news, was born in Arabia in the year 571 C.E. At the time of his birth the true religion had been forgotten or distorted all over the world. The people among whom he was born, the Ishmaelite Arabs, were polytheists and idolaters.

They were sunk in vice and superstition of every kind. There was no law among them except the law of the jungle and, per-chance, a few primitive tribal mores.

1. The Gospel of St. barnabas, edited and translated from a Manuscript in the Imperial Library at vienna by Lousdale and Laura Ragg; oxford.

Among these people who had drifted far from God's way, Prophet Mohammad grew up to be a Man of God. He was conspicuous among them by his pure and spotless character, his love of truth and compassion for the poor and the downtrodden. They called him Al-Amin the trustworthy, the faithful.

As he grew older the superstitions and evil ways of the people caused greater and greater sorrow to his heart. He spent many hours in communion with his Creator and in Meditation on the end or object of man's life. He longed to bring the people to the Straight Path, to "render God unto man and man unto God." When he was forty years of age the Divine Light shone in its full resplendence in his heart and he was chosen by God to be His messenger to mankind.

He preached to them of one and only God, the Loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds. He ex-

horted them to shun all kinds of evil and cruelty and to love one another. He told them that real religion was the removal of the want and suffering of others and the sexless service of fellow-men, that the religious ceremonies were entirely useless if they did not train and discipline man to become more righteous and to work for the good of others: "Hast thou observed liim who belieth religion ? That is he who repelleth the orphan, and urgeth not th feeding of the needy. Ah, woe unto Worshippers who are heedless of their prayers; who would be seen at worship, yet refrain from works of mercy!" (The Quran 107). He struck at the root of the false superiorly based on colour, caste, race or nationality, deciamng that all human beings were brothers.

The treatment meted out to the Prophet Muhammad by his people was not different from that meted out to the earlier prophets. He was rejected by people with vested interests and subjected to all kinds of

cruelties. Many of those that believed in him were brutally murdered. A combined attempt was made by all the tribes of Mecca to put an end to his life. After bearing these tortures and cruelties for thirteen long years with almost superhuman patience and forbearance, Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) at last migrated to Madina, where a large number of the people had already embraced Islam and become his followers. This was the turning point in his life. The people of Medina not only believed in him and his message but also made him the head of their state. Here Prophet Muhammad, in addition to his moving appeals for individual change of heart and transformation of character, worked out the social implications of his message. The many revolutionary changes that he introduced included the raising of women to a position of equality with men, taking steps to abolish slavery, total prohibition of all kinds of intoxicating drinks and of gambling, putting an

end to exploitation of every kind, doing away with priesthood granting religious freedom to all individuals and communities. bringing into force the most enlightened code of laws ever known to man and the establishment of a welfare State and a form of administration which was an ideal blend of justice and mercy. He brought into being a universal brotherhood in which there was no distinction whatsoever on the basis of race, colour, language, wealth or sex. The distinguishing feature of those who joined this fold was zeal for the service of One God and of humanity After accomplishing his mission, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) the last prophet of God, departed from world in the year 632 C. E., leaving behind the Holy Quran, which was revealed to him by God, and his own sayings to guide the people for all times to come.

The Ideal Character

The Prophet of Islam led a life which can only be described as godly. He was the model par excellence for men in various situations and walks of life, as the Holy Quran says :

"Verily in the Messenger of God ye have a perfect example for him who looketh unto God and the Last Day, and remembereth God much." (33 : 21).

"O Prophet ! Lo ! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner, and as a summoner unto God by His permission, and as a lamp that giveth light". (33 : 45, 46).

He lived to the highest ideals of the Holy Quran and exemplified in his life the virtues mentioned in the Book of God. When his wife, Aisha, was questioned about his morals, her reply was, "His morals are the Quran." Conversely, when she was asked to explain certain ethical injunctions in the Quran she did so by illustrating them from the Prophet's life and

behaviour.

To say that he was sinless would be only a negative description of the man of God who had conquered all temptation and passions and lived only for the sake of and in complete accord with the Will of God.

"Say: Lo' my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds". (Al-Qur'an 6 : 163).

He was, as the Quran describes him, a "mercy to all the nations." His compassion extended to friends and foes alike. "Do you love your Creator ? Love your fellow-creatures first", was his advice to his followers. He felt extremely concerned at the depraved and corrupt state of the people around him. It grieved his heart very much when as the head of the state he had to pass an order of punishment on any one for the sake of justice or for the security of the young republic. But for his own sake he never even lifted his finger against any one. When at a critical

moment some one asked him to curse his enemies and persecutors, he replied : "I have not been sent to curse but as a mercy to mankind. O Lord, guide my people for they know not. " At the conquest of Mecca (to give just one instance out of many) he freely forgave all his enemies, who had spared no effort to annihilate him, his religion and his followers, and were guilty of murder and persecution. He told them. "This day there is no reproof against you". Here is a practical example of the maxim "Love your enemies". He had come to reclaim and reform the fallen humanity and he won the hearts of the anti-social elements of his time by love and kindness. His charity and readiness to help the people in all possible ways were proverbial. He was the greatest friend of the poor and the downtrodden.

He strove all his life to lead mankind to the one True God, to make them godly, to rescue them from error, superstitions and sins, but in inviting them to

the truth he faithfully observed the Qur'anic injunction, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). He had imbued himself with divine qualities and caused his fellow-men to take the greatest step towards the divine. Yet he remained humble and modest, conscious always of the nothingness before God, and from the highest peak of moral and spiritual perfection to which he had attained he cried out to the people, "I am only a mortal like you." (Al-Qura'an 41:6).

Non-Muslims' Tributes to the Prophet

With the passing of Oriental Studies from the hands of Christian missionaries and divines into those of independent scholars the appreciation of the Prophet Muhammad and his message is growing in the West.

Here are two extracts about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from a recent book by a learned American professor :

“Pure-hearted and beloved in his circle, he was, it is said, of sweet and gentle disposition. His bereavements having made him sensitive to human suffering in every form, he was always ready to help others, especially the poor and the weak. His sense of honour, duty and fidelity won him as he grew older the high and enviable title of ‘The True.’ ‘The Upright,’ ‘The Trustworthy One’. Yet despite his concern for others he remained removed from them in outlook and ways, isolated in the midst of an effetic and chaotic society. As he grew from child hood to youth and from youth to manhood the lawless strife of his contemporaries, the repeated outbursts of pointless quarrels among the tribes frequenting the Meccan fairs, and the general immorality and cynicism of the day combined to produce in the prophet-to-be a sustained reaction of horror and disgust. Sii- lently, brooding, his thoughts turned inward. “1”.

1. Huston Smith, The Religions of Man, Mentor Books, P.203

In an age it would be more acceptable format to begin the second part of the quote two lines down. charged with supernaturalism, when miracles were accepted as the stock-in-trade of the most ordinary saint, Muhammad refused to traffic with human weakness and credulity. To miracle-hungry idolators seeking signs and portents he cut the issue clean: 'God has me to work wonders; He has sent me to preach to You.

My Lord be praised! A. I more than a man sent as an apostle ?' From first to last he resisted every impulse to glamorize his own person. 'I never said that Allah's treasures are in my hand, that I knew the hidden things, or that I was an angel... I am only a preacher of God's signs be sought, let them be not of Muhammad's great-words.the bringer of God's message to mankind.' If ness, but of God's, and for these one need only open one's eyes. The heavenly bodies holding their swift silent course in the vault of heav-

en, the incredible order of the universe, the rain that falls to relieve the parched earth, palms bending with golden fruit, ships that glide across the seas laden with goodness for man- can these be the handiwork of gods of stone ? What fools to cry for signs when creation harbours nothing else ! In a, age of credulity' Muhammad taught respect for the world's incontrovertible order which was to awaken Muslim science before Christian. "I

And this is how the well-known historian, Laile-Poole, sums up the character of the Prophet Muhammad :

"He who, standing alone, braved for years the hatred of his people, is the same who was never the first to withdraw his hand from another's Clasp; the beloved of children, who never passed a group of little ones without a smile from his wonderful eyes and a kind word for them, sounding all the kinder in that sweet-toned voice.

1. Huston Smith, The Religions of Man, Mentor Books. PP.205,206

He was one of those happy few who have attained the supreme joy of making one great truth their very life-spring. He was messenger of the one God; and never to his life's end did he forget who he was, or the message which was the marrow of his being. He brought his tidings to his people with a grand dignity sprung from the consciousness of his high office together ' with a most sweet humility whose roots lay in the knowledge of his own weakness."2

Major A. G. Leonard refers to the sincerity of the Prophet and the truth of his message in these words in his book *Islam, Her Moral and Spiritual Value* :

"He must at the outset recognise that Mohammed was no mere spiritual peddler, no vulgar time-serving vagrant, but one of the most profoundly sincere and earnest spirits of any age or epoch.

2. Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Speeches and Table Talk of the Prophet Mohammed*, Introduction, P.29.

A man not only great but one of the greatest-i.e., truest--men that humanity has ever produced. Great, i.e., not simply as a prophet but as a patriot and a statesman: a material as well as a spiritual builder who constructed a great nation, a great empire, and more even than all these, a still greater Faith. True moreover, because he was true to himself to his people, and above all to his God. Recognising this, he will thus acknowledge that Islam is a profound and true cult, which strives to uplift its votaries from the depths of human darkness into the higher realms of Light and Truth.”¹

Finally, this is what Lamartine, one of the greatest poets of France, writes about the greatness of Muhammad:

“Never has a man set himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superstitions which had been interposed between man

1. Maj. A.G. Leonard, Islam, Her Moral and Spiritual Value, PP.20-21.

and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry then existing. Never has a man undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he had in the conception as well as in the execution of such a great design no other instrument than himself, and no other aid except a handful of men living in a corner of the desert. Finally, never has a man accomplished such a huge and lasting revolution in the world, because in less than two centuries after its appearance, Islam, in faith and arms, reigned over the whole of Arabia, and conquered in God's name Persia, Khorasan, Transoxania, Western India, Syria, Abyssinia, all the known continent of Northern Africa, numerous islands of the Mediterranean, Spain, and a part of Gaul." "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and outstanding results are the three criteria of hu-

man genius, who could dare to compare any great men in modern history to Muhammad? The most famous men created arm, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislation, empires, peoples, and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which has blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. He has left to us as the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality, the hatred of false gods and passion for the One and Immaterial God. This avenging patriotism against the profanation of Heaven formed the virtue of the followers of Muhammad: the conquest of one-third of the earth to his dogma was his

miracle; or rather it was not the miracle of a man but that of reason. The idea of the unity of God proclaimed amidst the exhaustion of fabulous theogonies, was in itself such a miracle that upon its utterance from his lips it destroyed all the ancient temples of idols and set on fire one-third of the world. His life, his meditations, his heroic revilings against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying the furies of idolatry; his firmness in enduring them for fifteen years at Mecca, his acceptance of the role of public scum and almost of being a victim of his fellow-countrymen: all these and, finally his incessant preaching, his wars against odds, his faith in his success and his superhuman security in inisfortune, his forbearance in victory, his ambition which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire; his endless prayer, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death ; all these attest not to an

imposture but to a firm power to restore a dogma. This dogma was two-fold, the unity of God and the immateriality of God; the former telling what God is; the latter telling what God is not. 'Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior conqueror of ideas; restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad.' As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask : is there any man greater than he ?"I

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1. Lamartine, *Historie de la Turquie*, Vol. II, pp. 276,277;
Quoted by Dr. Kaki Ali in his book *Islam in the World*.

Historicity

Comparisons are sometimes odious, but even if one was so inclined one would soon find that the Jesus of the Gospels and Prophet Muhammad offer no comparison at all. For, while Prophet Muhammad is a thoroughly historical character, every detail of whose life is preserved in critically tested books of Hadis and history, the life and character of Jesus are shrouded in mystery.

There are scholars who totally dismiss the historical existence of Jesus and regard him as a character of mythology. But even if we consider this to be an extreme view and grant, as do the Muslims, that a person called Jesus was actually born in Palestine a few years before the beginning of the Christian era and claimed to be the expected Messiah of the Jews, our information about him is so fragmentary and uncertain that no clear picture of his life and personality emerges in our minds. There are doubts about the

date, place and manner of his birth; there is nothing known about the first thirty years of his life ; there are differences on the question of his death. The Gospels tell u only of little more than two years of his life and that too in a manner that can hardly pass the test of historical criticism.

In an earlier chapter, Dr. C.J. Cadoux, who was Mackennal Professor of Church History at Oxford, was quoted as having written that many modern scholars and critics regard as hopeless an attempt to separate the historically ture from the legnedary or mythical matter which the Gospels contain and to re-construct thestory of Jesus out of the more histo-shadowy and glorified figure.

Complete Model

Although on teh basis of the Holy Quran I regard the characters of Jesus and Prophet Muhammad to be qually godly, pure, noble and inspiring, yet jesus did not get the opportunity to become a perfect mod-

el for men in all walks of life as the Prophet Muhammad did. We have no doubt that if Jesus had got the chance he would have behaved exactly as Prophet Muhammad did; for both of them were prophets of the same god.

Jesus never married and so he could not become an ideal husband and father. He did not triumph over his enemies and so had no chance of showing how a victor should behave towards his vanquished foes who have spared no pains to annihilate him and his followers. He did not have his persecutors at his mercy and so had no occasion to show real forbearance and forgiveness. Jesus did not rise to power to become the model of a benevolent and just ruler and judge.

We must turn to Prophet Muhammad, and not Jesus, if we want to see the picture of an ideally happy and peaceful married life and of a wise, just and benevolent ruler whom nothing could corrupt or divert

from working for the material and moral amelioration of his people. Prophet Muhammad witnessed both the phases of persecution and success. He showed rare patience, fortitude, courage and love for his foes as a persecuted preacher of religion and in the hours of deepest gloom, and unparalleled self-control and mercy when his bitterest foes were helpless before him.

Jesus did not get the chance to put into practice many of his precepts and teachings. For instance, he advised his followers to sell their garments and purchase swords (Luke 22:36), but he could not demonstrate to them the right use of the sword. To resist violence and aggression sometimes becomes our highest duty for instance, when helpless men, women and children are being slaughtered and the freedom to believe and practice the religion of their own choice is denied to people by fanatics and tyrants. It was Prophet Muhammad who showed how a true

soldier of God, the protector of the victims of intolerance and cruel violence, should behave on the battlefield and in moments of defeat and triumph.

The life of Jesus runs parallel to the early life of the Prophet Muhammad, but Jesus did not live long enough to give a practical shape to his teachings and work out the social implication of his message. He did not have the chance to enlarge his teachings to cover all the situations of life and to bring about the tremendous social reforms that Prophet Muhammad did. The modern man, who has to lead a life as a husband, a father, a poor worker, a citizen, a neighbour, a despised advocate of new ideas and ways, a victim of religious and political bigotry, a man with authority, a successful leader of man, a soldier, a businessman, a judge, and a ruler, will find Prophet Muhammad as a perfect model for him in all situations and walks of life.