

CHAPTER TWO:
A STUDY OF MUHAMMAD'S PERSONALITY

AN ASSESSMENT OF HIS PERSONALITY

1. The Loyalty and Confidence of his Companions.

Since the inception of Islam the Muslim world has held to the unwavering conviction that Muhammad was the last and the greatest of the prophets. The Christian world, on the other hand, has expressed varied assessments of his character, ranging from one extreme to the other. In former times it was customary to hold that Muhammad was a conscious impostor, a devil-inspired false prophet whom the infidel Turks; or, at best, "Mahometans", worshipped as their god. In more recent times the access the West has enjoyed to the early records of his life has produced a more objective response. Many consider that he was a sincere seeker after truth who introduced noble reforms into his society and is to be honoured according to the achievements and standards of his time. Some even concede that he was a true prophet, one whom God directed as he had inspired the other prophets from of old. The evangelical church, however, steadfastly rejects this view, if for no other reason than that he denied the deity and crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Amongst other essentials of the Christian Faith i.e. the Sonship of Christ - Note by Ministry to Muslims).

These two denials, which strike at the whole foundation of the Christian faith, do seem to rule out the possibility that any Christian evaluation of his prophetic claims can produce anything other than a negative response and conclusion. Nonetheless, aware of the prejudices of our forefathers, it behooves us to assess the Prophet of Islam sincerely. A purely objective estimate of his character may not be possible, our convictions being what they are, but it is incumbent upon us to be as fair as we can be.

We can safely reject the view that Muhammad was a deliberate impostor. Throughout the twenty-three year period of his assumed ministry, he held to the unflinching conviction that he was called to be a prophet and that the revelations he was receiving were coming to him from above (muhammad did have doubts and was influenced by people around him, in fact he had to be convinced that the visions which he was experiencing were not demonic but divine, he believed himself to be a demoniac or insane. - Note by Ministry to Muslims).

Mohammed never wavered in his belief in his own mission, nor, what is more extraordinary, in his belief as to its precise nature and well-defined limits. (Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, p. 148). (As stated in the previous note muhammad did in fact "waver". That he never the less persevered in his convictions does not add any merit to his life. - Note by Ministry to Muslims)

One of the best evidences of his subjective sincerity is the almost fanatical devotion of his companions to his mission. With only a few exceptions, those nearest to him, once converted, stood with him through triumph and defeat, trial and setback, poverty and persecution (This cannot be said about his other followers who apostatized immediately after his death, simply look to the "apostate wars" - Note by Ministry to Muslims).

It is strongly corroborative of Mahomet's sincerity that the earliest converts to Islam were not only of upright character, but his own bosom friends and people of his household; who, intimately acquainted with his private life, could not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which ever more or less exist between the professions of the hypocritical deceiver abroad and his actions at home. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 54).

The intense faith and conviction on the part of the immediate followers of Mohammed is the noblest testimony to his sincerity and his utter self-absorption in his appointed task. (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 22). (The devotion of his followers is not necessarily a testimony of Muhammad's personal conviction. Many leaders have had extremely loyal followings only to later abandon their own positions. - Note by Ministry to Muslims)

One of his earliest converts, Abu Bakr, was a leading man in Mecca and one whose devotion to Muhammad was as steadfast as it could be (as we have seen on the occasion of his concealment with Muhammad in the cave on Mount Thaur). Even when Muhammad proclaimed that he had been taken to Jerusalem and back in one night by the angel Gabriel, a claim which alienated some of his own followers, Abu Bakr's allegiance remained unshaken. (We will shortly hear more of this phenomenon). He was duly named *as-Siddiq* by Muhammad, meaning "the Faithful", a title he seems to have fully deserved. A generally sincere and upright man, his unflinching loyalty to Muhammad is strong evidence of the latter's single-mindedness of purpose.

Abu Bakr was a man of the purest character. His friendship for Mahomet, and unwavering belief in his mission, are a strong testimony to the sincerity of the prophet. (Stobart, *Islam and its Founder*, p. 209).

I agree with Sprenger in considering 'the faith of Abu Bakr the greatest guarantee of the sincerity of Mohammed in the beginning of his career' - and, indeed, in a modified sense, throughout his life. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 56).

Even before his claim to prophethood Muhammad was highly esteemed for his integrity and earned the title *al-Amin*, 'the Trustworthy'. Judged relatively by the standards of his day, he appears to emerge without reproach; and there are many in the West today who refuse to challenge the worthiness of his personality further. Is the Christian compelled to assess him in the same spirit of relative objectivity? Do we leave the judgment of history upon his character to a jury of his contemporary peers?

2. A Relative or an Absolute Standard of Judgment?

We cannot judge the Prophet of Islam according to our moral standards, but only according to the standards which he himself recognized. (Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith*, p. 188).

It is so often said that Muhammad's character must be appraised purely in the context of his age and environment. Seventh-century Arabia was a fairly primitive country and many things we would consider reprehensible, for example, raiding for booty, polygamy, etc., were regarded by the Arabs as perfectly normal and far from immoral or unethical. What right, therefore, do we have to judge Muhammad by any other standard than the relative values of his day? (We as Christians have every right and duty to judge all things by the standard of YHWH's revealed will and light of conscience. - Note by Ministry to Muslims).

Had Muhammad claimed to be nothing more than a local reformer or a prophet with a message purely for his own time and people, such a charge might be well-founded. But, by the end of his career, he had laid claim to being the greatest of all the prophets, God's universal messenger for all mankind a messenger with the final religion which was to supersede and eventually displace every other religion on earth.

Muslim writers accordingly know no limits in describing the alleged perfection of his virtues and the traditions of his life are saturated with eulogies exalting his personality to that of the greatest among men. This quote is symbolic of the claims made by almost all Muslim biographers of their prophet's course:

His life is the noblest record of a work nobly and faithfully performed . . . a life consecrated, from first to last, to the service of humanity. Is there another to be compared to his, with all its trials and temptations? Is there another which has stood the fire of the world and come out so unscathed? (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 112, 17).

When such claims are made, it cannot fairly be said that he is only to be judged by the standards of his day.

Now Muslims claim that Muhammad is a model of conduct and character for all mankind. In so doing they invite world opinion to pass judgement upon him. (Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, p. 333).

The thesis that Muhammad was great by the standards of his day and race is dubious praise for one whom Tradition makes an exemplar for all time and all mankind. (Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 187).

It is precisely at this point that the Christian attitude to Muhammad comes to the fore. "But, summoned up inevitably by his own special claim, silently there rises beside him . . . the figure of the Son of Man". (Gairdner, *The Reproach of Islam*, p. 75). Men like Gautama Buddha and Confucius may fairly escape a character analysis based on absolute standards but the Prophet of Islam, who elevated himself to at least equality with (if not superiority over) the founder of Christianity, is fairly exposed to a comparison with him at every turn. Jesus Christ was a man par excellence, one not only without error or sin, but the perfect man - a man endued with every worthy attribute to the full. He was one whose righteousness, love, holiness, honesty and purity were expressed to perfection. Muhammad invites comparison with him when he claims that he is his equal.

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying: I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind, and all the Prophets are of different mothers but belong to one religion and no Prophet was raised between me and Jesus. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, p. 1260).

We are therefore fully justified in assessing his character by the absolute standards so wondrously manifested in the person of our Saviour, even more so when we find Muhammad seeking to displace him at many points.

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: I shall be pre-eminent among the descendants of Adam on the Day of Resurrection and I will be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession will be accepted (by Allah). (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, p. 1230).

How does Muhammad compare with Jesus? In the next section we shall briefly analyse the course of his ministry and compare it with that of Jesus Christ, and in the next two chapters will assess certain facets of his life and behaviour while at Medina. These two quotes fairly anticipate the obvious and, indeed, only possible conclusion that can be drawn:

The genuineness and sincerity of Mohammed's piety, and the honesty of his belief in his religious call, are indisputable. Unfortunately it cannot be said that righteousness and straightforwardness are the most prominent traits of his character as a whole (Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith*, p. 185).

The domestic life of Muhammad, if the general standard of oriental rulers of his time be taken into account, is moderate in indulgence, though of course the standard of a prophet claiming to supersede Jesus Christ yields a very different result. (Stanton, *The Teaching of the Qur'an*, p. 27).

3. Jesus and Muhammad - The Cross and the Hijrah.

(SECTION OMITTED BY: Ministry to Muslims)

Jesus came not to set up an earthly kingdom but to redeem the world and prepare the way for many to become heirs of a heavenly kingdom. Muhammad left for Medina to establish the *ummah* of Islam (Surah 2.143), the community of true believers, a "kingdom of God" on earth.

The Hijrah was, as we have seen, the pathway to jihad. Muhammad left Mecca only to take steps immediately to interrupt its trade and ultimately to conquer and subdue it. The sword was unsheathed to protect the fledgling Muslim community at Medina. As we have seen, convenient expedients were justified in the name of the establishment and progress of Islam. Rules, even God's own laws, could be bent whenever the Muslim *ummah* found itself in conflict with non-Muslim opponents. After Muhammad's death Abu Bakr, through many conflicts, re-established Islam in the Arabian peninsula and his successor, Umar, soon sent out armed forces to subdue the lands around Arabia. Very significantly the Qur'anic injunction to begin fighting (Surah 2.216) followed immediately after the Hijrah.

Muhammad employed the age-old method of establishing an earthly dominion - force of arms. At Badr he despatched many of his former enemies including the notorious Abu Jahl. The Qur'an itself proclaims vengeance on his other great enemy, his uncle Abu Lahab:

Perish the hands of Abu Lahab, perish he! *Surah 111.1* (Arberry).

The later passages of the Qur'an give Muslims the right to take up arms against all-comers who threaten the Muslim *ummah* and to slay them wherever they be found (Surah 2.190-191). The book even contains an open licence to make war on all who do not acknowledge Islam, including Christians, until they "feel themselves subdued" (Surah 9.29).

Muhammad was a patient and tolerant preacher of monotheism and justice in Mecca but, after the Hijrah, became a ruler determined to sustain his power and the exclusive identity of his people, a theocratic community, by force of arms and by the subjugation of his enemies. (Not so, Muhammad was a critic and intolerant of the idiots and paganism of his own tribesmen and their neighbors. - Note by Ministry to Muslims)

For Mohammed the exodus to Medina meant a surprisingly rapid development of his position in power, which completely revolutionised conditions in Arabia, and before long was to have world-wide consequences; but in his own character it effected a decided downward move and a loss of the ideal. (Buhl, "The Character of Mohammed as a Prophet", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 1, p. 360).

But when he was transferred into the atmosphere of Medinah, he offered very little resistance to the corrupting action of the new social position . . . The figure of Mohammed loses in beauty, but gains in power. (Caetani, "The Development of Mohammed's Personality", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 4, p. 364).

Not only could Jesus have found shelter among the Greeks but he could also have mustered the support of all in Galilee to establish his ministry (John 6.15). When faced with the crucial decision, however, he took the opposite one to that taken by Muhammad. The Prophet of Islam chose the Hijrah, the spring of jihad for the subjugation and, where necessary, the destruction of his enemies. Jesus chose the cross, the symbol of his love and the means of salvation for all who were by nature the enemies of God (Romans 5.10). When Pilate asked him whether he had pretensions to set himself up as a ruler of his people ("Are you the king of the Jews?" John 18.33), he gave a very important and striking answer:

"My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world".
John 18.36

"My servants would fight", he said, just as Muhammad's companions did to protect and establish his earthly ummah. But Jesus came to make the kingdom of heaven accessible to men on earth and to establish a spiritual people constituting one body over all the earth, not to be gathered into an earthly community to be protected from all other tribes and nations, but to be united in one spirit, secure and prepared for a kingdom ready to be revealed in the last time. How different his attitude to that of Muhammad!

Muhammad sought to conquer by force, Jesus by love. At times Muhammad wrought the destruction of his enemies. Jesus prayed that his might be forgiven and live:

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. *Luke 23.34*

As he hung on that cross, he was an apparent failure. It seemed his labours had been in vain. The Hijrah took Muhammad from the depths of disconsolation to the prime of success but the cross took Jesus to an early grave.

The Muhammadan decision here is formative of all else in Islam. It was a decision for community, for resistance, for external victory, for pacification and rule. The decision for the cross - no less conscious, no less formative, no less inclusive - was the contrary decision. (Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 93).

But even as his earthly course came to its close, its eternal, immeasurable effects were being realised. A thief crucified with Jesus, one who had no other hope of salvation, turned to him humbly requesting him to "remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23.42). The answer reveals all the glorious implications of the choice Jesus made for the salvation of many rather than the establishment of his rule in an earthly form and his own personal protection:

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise. *Luke 23.43*

There are many Muslims who argue that their prophet's decision was justifiable and that his enemies deserved their fate. But how does his course at Medina compare with that one supreme manifestation of love and compassion at Calvary which knows no equal? Unfavourably, to say the least. On the other hand, we can comfortably meet the Muslims on their own ground by comparing the destinies of our respective founders.

The crucifixion of Jesus stands with his resurrection. The only historical record of his death on the cross testifies unambiguously to his resurrection to life after three days and his ascension to heaven forty days later. Who really succeeded in his mission - Muhammad, who lies dead and buried in Medina, or Jesus, who reigns in life in heaven above? The Hijrah led Muhammad to Medina, the seat of his earthly ummah. The cross led Jesus to resurrection and glory in the kingdom of heaven - the realm of eternal life.

Muhammad chose an earthly ummah and duly went the way of all flesh as his earthly body returned to dust in a city made of dust. Jesus preferred a heavenly kingdom and duly prepared the way for many as his heavenly body returned to heaven and a city which has eternal foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11.10).

The image of Him whose kingdom was not of this world, who did not strive nor cry, whose servants were never to draw the sword in His defence, forces itself upon the mind, in silent and reproachful antithesis to the mixed and sullied character of the Prophet-soldier Mohammed. (Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, p. 201).

4. A Christian Evaluation of Muhammad's Character.

The awesome objective of Jesus' ministry and the outstanding sacrifice he made to achieve it stand as high above the course of Muhammad's ministry as the heavens are high above the earth. In no less a degree does the profound character of the Saviour of the world tower over the personality of the Prophet of Islam. A Muslim writer states:

Even if Muhammad had sent ten thousand missionaries over the length and breadth of Arabia he could not have received such homage unto God as he did by means of his successful wars. (Sarwar, *Muhammad: The Holy Prophet*, p. 323).

This statement may be entirely consistent with the Muslim mentality of outward triumph and success but it is out of character with the marvellous standards and example set by the Son of man (The title "Son of Man" is a messianic reference and not a denial of the divinity of Jesus - Note by Ministry to Muslims), who has achieved more enduring results through his true messengers who have spread the effects of his salvation by word of mouth rather than by the sword of war. ([Section omitted by - Note by Ministry to Muslims] The propagation of Islam by "successful wars" is, however, fundamental to Islam as Sarwar duly shows).

Believers were never commanded to spread the religion of Christ by means of a holy war (Jihad), but, on the contrary, they were called to endure every kind of wrong and contumely, and did willingly suffer many and great afflictions and persecutions for proclaiming the Gospel. Most of the Apostles drank the cup of martyrdom in the cause of religion, and their oft-repeated command to all believers was, that they should bear patiently all sufferings for Christ's sake. (Pfander, *The Mizan ul Haqq; or Balance of Truth*, p. 72).

The fruits and successes of their labours will be known and made manifest at the only place where the value of a mans life can be truly tested - at the judgment seat of God on a Day yet to be revealed. Kenneth Cragg suggests that it may be true that "too much is made of Muhammad's circumstances and too little of his obligations to the absolutes of every age" (*The Call of the Minaret*, p. 92). The question is not whether he had a generally commendable character. A Christian evaluation of his character rightly begins by asking whether his manner was exemplary in *every* way and at *all* times as Jesus' truly was. In this respect, as will be seen all the more in the following two chapters, he fails to meet the mark.

The specific character of Islam and the transcending path of salvation brought to erring sinners by Jesus Christ can be distinguished in many instances, but the following tradition offers a typical example:

Narrated Jabir: A man from the tribe of Aslam came to the Prophet and confessed that he had committed an illegal intercourse . . . the Prophet ordered that he be stoned to death. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, p. 531).

The judgment was fair on legal grounds (Leviticus 20.10) ("Legal" only if we were Jews and still living under the Law, but not for the Christian Church - Note by Ministry to Muslims), but Muhammad's role can be compared with that assumed by Jesus when he was placed in a similar situation. When the Jewish doctors of the law produced a woman similarly self-condemned for adultery, Jesus immediately made her detractors examine themselves to see whether they were indeed worthy to stand as God's prosecutors, judges and executioners over her. "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8.7), he replied. As they all went out, convicted of their own sinfulness, he graciously pardoned the repentant woman in these comforting words:

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said "No one, Lord". And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again". *John 8.10-11*.

He had come to bring salvation to all and his own death to follow shortly was the ransom by which she was delivered from her prescribed fate. Here the whole difference between Islam and Christianity is fully revealed - the law enforced compared to grace freely bestowed. The Hijrah did not release Muhammad from the law, but the cross of Christ opened the door for repentant men and woman to obtain the forgiveness of their sins and a place in the eternal kingdom of heaven.

He certainly knew nothing of the real teaching of Jesus Christ. Had he known these things he would have seen how superior was the legal system he sought to supersede, how much higher the Christian morality he endeavoured to set aside. (Sell, *The Historical Development of the Qur'an*, p. 188).

Even a fervent apologist for Muhammad was constrained to draw similar conclusions when comparing Muhammad with Jesus:

The religion of Christ contains whole fields of morality and whole realms of thought which are all but outside the religion of Mohammed . . . the character of Jesus of Nazareth stands alone in its spotless purity and its unapproachable majesty. (Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, p 293, 294).

Perhaps the final judgment can be made to rest on the last statements made by Jesus and Muhammad respectively before they died. We have already seen how Jesus, at the last, sought the forgiveness and salvation of the Jews who had hated, opposed and finally crucified him. How unfavourably Muhammad's last recorded utterance compares:

'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz reported that the last statement made by the Apostle of Allah was: O Lord, perish the Jews and the Christians. They made churches of the graves of their Prophets. Beware, there should be no two faiths in Arabia. (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p. 371).

"Perish the Jews and the Christians" - famous last words indeed! A Muslim valiantly says of his prophet "As to the Christians, he nearly killed himself for their sake. He loved them as no one has ever loved them before or after" (Sarwar, *Muhammad: the Holy Prophet*, p. 105). There is no substance in these words. They are out of place and the Prophet of Islam unworthy of their sentiments. They seem to be far more suited to the lowly man of Nazareth, except that he really was killed for their sake. Nevertheless the Muslim effort to apply to Muhammad praises due only to Jesus Christ perhaps indicates the awareness in Islam of the surpassing worth of the Christian Saviour - he who stands alone above all men of every age as the perfect example of love, righteousness, purity and truthfulness.

HIS TREATMENT OF HIS PERSONAL ENEMIES

1. Were Muhammad's Wars Purely Defensive?

We have, in the last section, seen what a great difference there was between the Prince of Peace and the Prophet of Islam. A more detailed examination of his attitudes towards his enemies, especially his personal foes, reveals a flaw in his personality not readily explained away. It is here that we find a weak point in Muhammad's character and one which troubles Muslim apologists.

To set forth this period in the Prophet's career objectively, without offending modern Muslim susceptibilities, is difficult in the extreme. (Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 84).

Before passing on to individual examples, let us consider the whole question of jihad from a general standpoint. It is invariably claimed by Muslim writers today that Muhammad's wars were purely defensive. "Islam seized the sword in self defence, and held it in self-defence, as it will ever do". (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 218). In this way they endeavour to set aside the charge that Muhammad took the sword to his enemies, seeking their destruction and their possessions as booty and plunder. One writer goes so far as to say:

Persia and Rome were thus the aggressors, and the Muslims, in sheer self-defence, came into conflict with those mighty empires. (Ali, *The Religion of Islam*, p. 463).

This is extremely hard to credit from an historical perspective. There is no evidence that the Persian or Byzantine empires had any designs on the Hijaz in Arabia during Muhammad's time, let alone the fledgling Muslim community at Medina. On the other hand, when Umar was caliph, the Muslims took the fight to Greek and Persian soil and conquered their territories.

Muhammad, during his ministry, was at no time threatened by an invasion from the north. His chief concern was the Quraysh and, next to them, the hostile pagan Bedouin tribes of the Hijaz. But even in this context he is blandly portrayed as a harmless defender of the faith against relentless plots and threats from those around him. Such claims are, from an historical perspective, unjustifiable. Yet they are found in many works, of which the following statement is typical:

People who accuse Muhammad of fighting the Quraish forget that the Quraish were the aggressors and that during all these years Muhammad had no option but to defend himself and his followers. (Sarwar, *Muhammad: the Holy Prophet*, p. 87).

The claim that one is fighting purely in self-defence is one of the most elliptical ever made by men and nations throughout human history. ... (section omitted by Ministry to Muslims). The Muslim claim that his wars were purely defensive appears to be more rhetorical than historical in substance.

One writer even has the audacity to say of the Meccan caravan trade: "These caravans constituted a grave threat to the security of Medina". (Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets*, p. 111).

Some authors will go to great lengths to exonerate Muhammad and remove the stigma that the raiding parties have left on his character. These caravans were invariably lightly manned and armed. Even the large annual caravan from Mecca to Syria had to pass Medina by a special route each year to avoid capture and, when Abu Sufyan learnt that a raiding party was coming out of Medina to meet him on his return in 624 AD, he had to hasten on to protect the caravan and was compelled to call for a force from Mecca to escort him. The "grave threat" was, in truth, the other way around.

Within a hundred years the Muslim hordes, by force of arms, had conquered territories from Spain in the West to India in the East. Was this all purely defensive? What threat faced the small community of Muslims in Medina from the shores of Spain and frontiers of France? The thesis that Muhammad never took the sword for aggressive purposes appears very weak in the light of this famous verse from the Qur'an, known as the *ayatus-saif*, the "verse of the sword":

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war).
Surah 9.5

They were only to be spared if they repented and became Muslims, the verse continues. Another wishful claim, made in bold defiance of the facts of history, is that Muhammad "never killed a single prisoner of war" (All, *The Religion of Islam*, p. 483). We have already seen how Muhammad had Abu Azzah executed after the Battle of Uhud. Another was an-Nadhr ibn al-Harith who was ordered to be beheaded by Muhammad after the Battle of Badr for the capital offence of challenging Muhammad's revelations and composing surahs and stories like those in the Qur'an. (The Qur'an boldly invites all-comers to attempt to produce passages equal to its own in Surah 11.13 but Muhammad was sorely tried whenever anyone ventured to do so). Yet another victim at Badr was Uqba ibn abi Muait.

The Battle of Badr has been celebrated in Islam as its first true moment of glory and yet even here we find Muhammad and his companions bent on vengeance and the destruction of those who had persecuted them. A Muslim writer gives us a useful insight into the thoughts of the Muslims as they prepared for the first battle they were to fight for Islam:

Before entering battle, they resolved to direct their attention to the leaders and nobles of the Quraysh. They planned to seek them and to kill them first, remembering the persecution and travails they had suffered at their hands in Makkah, especially the blocking of the road to God and to the holy mosque. (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 229).

Another unedifying spectacle that greets the reader is the reaction of Muhammad when he learnt of the death, on the same battlefield, of the man who had persecuted him so much during his days in Mecca:

Among the leaders of Quraish who met their death was Abu Jahal, chief of the clan of Beni Makhzoom, the Apostle's bitterest enemy. Muhammad send his servant to search the field for his corpse. When he found it, he cut off his head and threw it down at the feet of the Apostle who cried ecstatically, "The head of the enemy of God Praise God, for there is no other but He!" (Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 186).

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves" is the advice of the Apostle Paul (Romans 12.19), following the teaching and example of his Master (Luke 6.27-31). Not so the dictum of Muhammad, who constantly plotted revenge against his personal enemies and delighted in it when it was achieved.

2. The Assassination of Ka'b ibn Ashraf.

Shortly after the Battle of Badr an incident occurred, widely reported in the Hadith, which Muir describes as another of those dastardly acts of cruelty which darken the pages of the Prophet's life" (*The Life of Mahomet*, p. 238). It was the clandestine killing of a Jew, Ka'b ibn Ashraf, who "was at Mahomet's instigation assassinated under circumstances of the blackest treachery" (Stobart, *Islam and its Founder*, p. 158). He had been one of those poets who had irritated Muhammad with his satirical verses. After Badr he mourned the leaders of the Quraysh and visited Mecca to stir up a reprisal raid against the Muslims. What ultimately transpired is described in unemotional language in the traditions:

Narrated Jabir: The Prophet said, "Who is ready to kill Ka'b ibn Ashraf?". Muhammad bin Maslama replied, "Do you like me to kill him?" The Prophet replied in the affirmative. Muhammad bin Maslama said, "Then allow me to say what I like". The Prophet replied, "I do". (*Sahih at-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, p. 168).

In another tradition Muhammad ibn Maslama's statement "allow me to say what I like" is interpreted to mean that he should be allowed to say a "false" thing to deceive Ka'b. (*Sahih at-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p. 248). An early biographer is quite unambiguous in his record of this commission:

The apostle said "All that is incumbent upon you is that you should try". He said "O apostle of God, we shall have to tell lies". He answered "Say what you like, for you are free in the matter". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 367).

It is hardly any wonder that writers like Muir and Stobart speak so harshly of Muhammad's conduct in this matter. This was a direct order to effect the murder of one of his opponents coupled with a licence to resort to any manner of lies to achieve it. Muhammad's companion of the same name duly took advantage of the freedom given him to use deceitful means to dispose of the unsuspecting Jew:

Muhammad b. Maslama came to Ka'b and talked to him, referred to the old friendship between them and said: This man (i.e. the Holy Prophet) has made up his mind to collect charity (from us) and this has put us to a great hardship. When he heard this, Ka'b said: By God, you will be put to more trouble by him. Muhammad b. Maslama said: no doubt, now we have become his followers and we do not like to forsake him until we see what turn his affairs will take. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, p. 991).

The subtle claim that Muhammad had burdened the Medinan Muslims (Ibn Maslama was of the Aus tribe) duly persuaded Ka'b that the men with him meant him no harm. His own foster brother Abu Natilah, also among the party, was even more convincing than his companion:

He said: I am Abu Na'ilah, and I have come to you to inform you that the advent of this man (the Prophet) is a calamity for us. The Arabs are fighting with us and they are shooting from one bow (i.e. they are united against us). We want to keep away from him (the Prophet). (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 36).

Ibn Sa'd goes on to say that when these men, who claimed they had come to purchase food and dates from him, finally met Ka'b again during the evening, he talked freely with them and was "pleased with them and became intimate with them" (op. cit., p.37). Coming closer to him on the presence that they wished to smell his perfume, Ibn Maslama and the others immediately drew their swords and killed him. They returned to Muhammad uttering the takbir ("*Allahu Akbar*" - Allah is Most Great).

When they reached the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him; he said: (Your) faces be lucky. They said: Yours too, O Apostle of Allah! They cast his head before him. He (the Prophet) praised Allah on his being slain. When it was morning, he said: Kill every Jew whom you come across. The Jews were frightened, so none of them came out, nor did they speak. They were afraid that they would be suddenly attacked as Ibn Ashraf was attacked in the night. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 37).

This affair discredits Muhammad's claim to be a prophet. Who can read these sordid details without being nauseated in his spirit? Muslim biographers, as is to be expected, have sought to exculpate their Prophet in this matter. One has very artfully rewritten history by giving no indication that Muhammad had any part in this murderous scene. Claiming that Ka'b had vexed the Muslims of Medina with false accusations against their womenfolk, he puts the responsibility for his assassination at the feet of the Muslims alone without any reference in his narrative to Muhammad's part in it:

They were so incensed and irritated by him that, after unanimously agreeing to kill him, they authorized Abu Na'ilah to seek his company and win his confidence. Abu Na'ilah said to Ka'b, "The advent of Muhammad was a misfortune to all of us". (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 244).

One can see how awkward Muhammad's role in this matter was for the Egyptian author. Finding no way to justify him, he expediently left him out of the affair altogether.

It is tendentious of Haykal not to reveal that it was not the Muslims but Muhammad himself who took the initiative in having him killed, a fact about which there is no doubt in Ibn Hisham's account. "Who will rid me of the son of Ashraf?" (Weasels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muhammad*, p. 183).

Other Muslim writers have produced a more imaginative defence of their Prophet's action. They have given it a forensic touch by claiming that, as ruler in Medina, Muhammad had a right to order the execution of those who were guilty of high treason. One writer alleges that "Christian controversialists" have "shut their eyes to the justice of the sentence, and the necessity of a swift and secret execution (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 74). Mitigation of Muhammad's action is sought in legal terminology, viz. "sentence", "execution", etc. Another writer seeks to remove the sting in the course of this affair by the use of similar terms:

When the Holy Prophet was convinced of these various offences of Kaab, he determined that Kaab had earned the ultimate penalty several times over ... He, therefore, decided that Kaab would not be executed publicly, but silently without any fuss. (Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets*, p. 138).

Muhammad at this stage was anything but the undisputed ruler of Medina and the devious methods adopted to despatch the offending Jew, when exposed to public view as they so blandly are in the traditions, still leave the firm impression that this was an act of cold-blooded murder coupled with a host of lies, both of which had the sanction of the Prophet of Islam.

It is not surprising to find such incidents leading to strange teachings in Muslim writings. One writer comments on the fate due to "traitors" in these words:

And a traitor guilty of high treason is an outlaw and may be killed by anyone without any special authority. May God guide us all to the Truth and spread peace and unity amongst mankind! (Sarwar, *Muhammad: the Holy Prophet*, p. 195).

These words almost defy comment! Well does the author appeal to God for guidance into the Truth - he is much in need of it. His licence to all and sundry to take the law into their own hands by lynching those whom they consider to be "traitors" (Ka'b never espoused Muhammad's cause) seems hardly consistent with his professed desire for peace among men. But his comment does give a truer picture of what really happened that night than the legal euphemisms of men like Syed Ameer Ali and Muhammad Zafrulla Khan.

3. The Murder of Abu Rafi.

On many occasions Muhammad showed commendable magnanimity towards his enemies but every now and then we are faced with individual cases which seriously compromise his claim to be God's final messenger to mankind. Another Jew, Abu Rafi, one of the chiefs of the Banu Nadhir exiled after the Battle of Uhud, was also murdered at his instigation. Abu Rafi's true name was Sallam ibn abi al-Huqaiq and he lived in one of the forts at Khaibar before Muhammad's conquest of the settlement. This tradition tells its own story:

Narrated Al-Bara: Allah's Apostle sent Abdullah bin Atik and Abdullah bin Utba with a group of men to Abu Rafi (to kill him) . . . (Abdullah said) "I called, 'O Abu Rafi!' He replied 'Who is it?' I proceeded towards the voice and hit him. He cried loudly but my blow was futile. Then I came to him, pretending to help him, saying with a different tone of my voice, 'What is wrong with you, O Abu Rafi?' He said 'Are you not surprised? Woe on your mother! A man has come to me and hit me with a sword!' So again I aimed at him and hit him, but

the blow proved futile again, and on that Abu Rafi cried loudly and his wife got up. I came again and changed my voice as if I were a helper, and found Abu Rafi lying straight on his back, so I drove the sword into his belly and bent on it till I heard the sound of a bone break". (*Sahih al- Bukhari*, Vol. 5, pp. 253, 254).

The narrative is unsavoury, to say the least, and once again we have the usual ingredients - a calculated murder accomplished through deceit and presence. Ibn Ishaq informs us that when Abu Rafi's wife asked the group who they were they politely answered "Arabs in search of supplies" (*Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 483). It is no wonder that Islam does not, even to this day, reprobate every form of dishonesty. A Muslim writer unashamedly says:

Falsehood is not always bad, to be sure; there are times when telling a lie is more profitable and better for the general welfare, and for the settlement of conciliation among people, than telling the truth. (Tabbarah, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 255).

How much more reliable are the absolute standards set out in the teaching of Jesus who warned that anyone given to even a little dishonesty in any given circumstance was dishonest through and through (Luke 16.10). Indeed in one statement made by Jesus we have a perfect analysis of the source of the motivation behind the murders of Ka'b and Abu Rafi and the lies accompanying them, and his words might just as well have been addressed to all those involved in their so-called "executions":

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. *John 8.44*

Furthermore we are told in the Hadith that both these murders were accomplished secretly at night. The Bible gives sound reasons why such evil deeds are performed under the cover of darkness:

Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. *John 3.19-20*

It is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret. *Ephesians 5.12*

4. A Christian Perspective and Conclusion.

It is often claimed by Muslims that their Prophet's actions were consistent with both the standards of his day in Arabia and with those of many of the prophets of Israel in pre-Christian times (ea. David's scheme to kill Uriah the Hittite, etc.). Syed Ameer Ali says of the massacre of the Banu Quraydhah: "We simply look upon it as an act done in complete accordance with the laws of war as then understood by the nations of the world" (*The Spirit of Islam*, p. 81). This brings us back once again to relative standards - the only ones, it seems, by which Muhammad and his religion can be justified. The defence sometimes takes a different form - it is alleged that the Muslims acted according to the basic principles of human nature. Here is an example:

It was not in their nature to suffer such injustices or to submit to such tyranny for long without thinking of avenging themselves. (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 198).

It is precisely at this point that Islam becomes something of an anachronism, an outdated form of religion which was, centuries earlier, replaced by one that was far better. When Jesus came into the world a new covenant was introduced, one far better than the one it replaced (Hebrews 8.6). One of the better essences of this new covenant is the universal pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all who truly belong to Jesus Christ so that they may no longer be bound to their ordinary natures but to the new nature within them which has Divine qualities (cf. 1 Corinthians, 2.12). As Hayka' says of Mohammad

and his companions, it was "not in their nature" to suffer patiently, leaving vengeance to the Lord. But this very thing *is* in the nature of true Christians because they are born of the Holy Spirit and have divine power to become what God truly wants men to be. How graciously these words of a follower of Jesus compare with the spirit of the followers of Muhammad:

For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, for Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. *1 Peter 2.19-21*

Jesus Christ brought a new morality into the world. He showed that earthly survival and security were not paramount objectives for men and nations but rather that men should seek to become like God in their characters. He died and rose again to make such things possible. He introduced a higher standard of righteousness, one much superior to that of Islam.

For the Islam of Mohammed, coming after Christ, reverted to the lower types before him. The Prophet of Islam was in fact precisely the type of Messiah after which the Jews of Christ's day hankered, and which Jesus Christ Himself definitely rejected, from the Mount of Temptation and from the Mount of Calvary. (Gairdner, *The Reproach of Islam*, p. 63).

When Muhammad found that the Jews and Christians were ultimately not going to acknowledge his claims, he became very antagonistic towards them. The Qur'an says of both these groups "God's curse be on them!" (Surah 9.30). The original words in Arabic, however, are *qautalahumullaah* which mean, quite literally, "Allah kill them". Jesus was also faced with a people who would not receive him. As he passed through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem, the Samaritans refused to accommodate him. Two of his disciples exclaimed "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9.54). This is the spirit of human nature, the spirit of vengeance, the spirit of Islam. But Jesus turned and rebuked them, saying:

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them". *Luke 9.55*

The wondrous forbearing love of the Saviour of the world stands out, in all his teaching and actions, above the spirit of Islam. It was he who set the perfect example of love before the world when he prayed for the salvation of his enemies even as they crucified him, and bade his disciples do likewise: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6.27-28). Indeed when Jesus gave a parable to demonstrate what true love was just after he had been rejected by the Samaritans, he chose a Samaritan as the hero of his story (Luke 10.33).

The progress of Islam begins to stand out in unenviable contrast with that of early Christianity. Converts were gained to the faith of Jesus by witnessing the constancy with which its confessors suffered death; they were gained to Islam by the spectacle of the readiness with which its adherents inflicted death. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 242).

On the night Jesus was betrayed he called his betrayer his friend (Matthew 26.50), healed one of the soldiers who came to arrest him (Luke 22.51), and prayed for a disciple who was to desert him (Luke 22.32). The next day, when all human vindictiveness was let loose against him, he commended Pilate (John 19.11), comforted a man who but a few hours earlier had reviled him (Luke 23.43, Matthew 27.44), and sought the forgiveness of his murderers (Luke 23.34). This was the spirit of the man Jesus Christ. The same spirit has been manifested in thousands of true Christians since his ascension to heaven. Encouraged by his example and fortified by the Holy Spirit, his followers have also loved their enemies and prayed for the forgiveness of their murderers (Acts 7.60).

From the moment of his ascension to the moment of his return, his perfect standard is publicly portrayed before all men. The spirit of the Christian Gospel is the heart of true religion, one which summons human character to perfection, sets an incomparable example of it (Ephesians 5.2), and provides the Spirit by which such perfection is attainable. The prophets who came before Jesus Christ looked forward earnestly to the coming of their Redeemer, the Messiah, and when he came he introduced a religion and way of life vastly superior to that which went before. If the best thing that can be said for the spirit and attitudes of Muhammad and his companions is that they were no different to those who came before Jesus Christ, then this is one of the best reasons for not accepting the religion he introduced. It may compare favourably with Judaism but is considerably inferior to the spirit of true Christianity.

Although Mohammed had many noble qualities and was prophetically gifted with the inspiration of monotheism, his moral character broke down under the stress of temptation. Is it not pathetic that such a vast number of the human race is looking to him as the sole interpreter of God and as their guide for life and death? (Trowbridge, "Mohammed's View of Religious War", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 3, p. 305).

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS MARRIAGES

1. Muhammad and his Wives.

For twenty-five years Muhammad was married to only one woman, his faithful and upright wife Khadija, but after her death he took a number of wives. The exact number is not certain but it is believed that he had thirteen wives in all, nine of whom succeeded him. The polygamy he practiced, and which he allowed to Muslims in general, has often been looked upon as a further weakness in his character. A brief examination of his marriages after the death of Khadija will assist us to draw our own conclusions.

Before the Hijrah Muhammad married *Sauda bint Zam'ah*, a widow with a son who had been among the emigrants to Abyssinia. She was over thirty years of age. At about the same time he was betrothed to *Ayishah* whom he married formally three years later in Medina (Ayisha was Muhammad's child bride whom Muhammad took at age 6 and consummated the marriage when she was 9, he was in his fifties at the time. - Note by Ministry to Muslims). She was his favourite wife and a woman who played a large part in the early development of Islam. At Medina she was once left behind during a journey home and was brought back by one of Muhammad's companions, Safwan, who had emigrated from Mecca. A scandal spread in Medina as sinister accusations were levelled against the two but, after being estranged from her for a while, Muhammad received a revelation (Surah 24.11-20) upholding her innocence and reproving those who had falsely accused her. They were subsequently beaten for their slanders.

Ayishah features prominently in the Hadith. A great number of traditions are attributed to her and her opinion was widely sought in many matters as she was a woman of considerable intellect and knowledge. One of the early Muslims said of her:

I have not seen any one having more knowledge of the *sunnah* (practice) of the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, than Ayishah, nor more intelligent in opinion if her opinion was sought, or having better knowledge of the verses as to what they were revealed about, or in calculating the *fara'id* (inheritance). (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab at-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 481).

After Ayishah Muhammad married the daughter of Umar, *Hafsah*, whose husband was killed at Badr. He then married Umm *Salamah* and *Zaynab bint Khuzaymah* in quick succession. Zaynab died, however, within three months of her marriage to Muhammad. His next marriage was to a young woman named *Juwayriyah* of the Banu Khuza'ah, defeated in an attack by Muhammad in the fifth year of the Hijrah. Her marriage became a ransom for the whole tribe who were released immediately. The young Ayishah, becoming patently jealous of the increasing number of wives being added to the household, commented:

She was a most beautiful woman. She captivated every man who saw her. She came to the Apostle to ask his help in the matter. As soon as I saw her at the door of my room I took a dislike for her, for I knew that he would see her as I saw her. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 493).

Ayishah wryly concluded: I do not know a woman who was a greater blessing to her people than she (op. cit.). After this Muhammad married *Zaynab bint Jahsh* and a Coptic slavewoman *Mariyah*. More will be heard of these two presently, but it is interesting to note here that, out of all his marriages at Medina, Mariyah alone bore him a child, a much-loved son named Ibrahim, who died after eighteen months.

Following these two were the daughter of Abu Sufyan, *Umm Habibah*, who had also emigrated to Abyssinia, and a Jewess *Safiyah*, who lost her father Huyayy, her husband Kinanah, and both her brothers during Muhammad's assault on the fortress at Khaibar. His last marriage was to a widow named *Maymunah*. The only wife left out is another Jewess named *Rayhanah* as there is some doubt as to whether she ever married Muhammad. She was one of the women captured after the siege of the Banu

Quraydhah, the Jewish tribe near Medina subsequently massacred for colluding with the Quraysh. A Muslim writer says "The story about Raihana becoming a wife of the Prophet is a fabrication, for, after this event, she disappears from history and we hear no more of her, whilst of others we have full and circumstantial accounts" (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 82). The manner in which she was brought into Muhammad's entourage is given in this brief narrative:

He invited her to be his wife; but she declined and chose to remain (as indeed, having refused marriage, she had no alternative) his slave or concubine. She also declined the summons to conversion, and continued in the Jewish faith, at which the Prophet was much concerned. It is said, however, that she afterwards embraced Islam. She did not many years survive her unhappy fate. (Muir, *The Life of Mohamet*, p. 309).

Having just witnessed the butchery of her husband and all her male relatives, it is hardly surprising to find that "She had shown repugnance towards Islam when she was captured and clung to Judaism (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 466). There are many Muslims who defend Muhammad's polygamous marriages by saying that most of his wives were divorcees or widows. It should be remembered that the two Jewish women attached to him were only widows because Muhammad's followers had slaughtered their husbands just before they were brought into his camp.

2. Muhammad's Marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh.

None of Muhammad's marriages has evoked as much comment as that with Zaynab bint Jahsh. This woman was his cousin and had been the wife of his adopted son Zaid. Muhammad had arranged the marriage but it appears that it went sour after a while. A remark by Muhammad himself one day added to the deteriorating relationship.

He had occasion to visit the house of Zaid, and upon seeing Zainab's unveiled face, had exclaimed, as a Moslem would say at the present day when admiring a beautiful picture or statue, Praise be to God, the ruler of hearts! The words, uttered in natural admiration, were often repeated by Zainab to her husband to show how even the Prophet praised her beauty, and naturally added to his displeasure. (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 235).

Zaid then determined to divorce her but, upon approaching Muhammad, was told to keep her as his wife. Things did not improve, however, and Zaid duly divorced her. Shortly afterwards Muhammad himself took her in marriage, giving by far the biggest wedding-feast he had given for any of his wives. A scandal soon broke out because he had married the ex- wife of his own adopted son, something frowned upon by the Arabs as tantamount to incest. A revelation in the Qur'an soon justified the marriage:

Behold! Thou didst say to one who had received the grace of God and thy favour: Retain thou (in wedlock) thy wife, and fear God. But thou didst hide in thy heart that which God was about to make manifest: thou didst fear the people, but it is more fitting that thou shouldst fear God. Then when Zaid had dissolved (his marriage) with her, with the necessary (formality), We joined her in marriage to thee: in order that (in future) there may be no difficulty to the believers in (the matter of) marriage with the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have dissolved with the necessary (formality their marriage) with them. And God's command must be fulfilled. *Surah 33.37*

The biography of at-Tabari suggests that Muhammad was visibly moved by Zaynab's beauty when he beheld her on this occasion and in many works this incident has led to a severe censure of Muhammad because it seems that he had caused the divorce between her and Zaid and had manipulated the situation so that he could marry her. This censure may well be unfounded. Zaynab was his own cousin and Muhammad had known her for many years and it is hard to believe that after all this time he was suddenly infatuated by an opportune view of her beauty. There seems to be much merit in the argument

that Muhammad would have taken her in marriage himself at first rather than give her in marriage to Zaid (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 295).

There is therefore a strong presumption that in the case of Zaynab bint Jahsh, Muhammad was not carried away by passion . . . it is unlikely that he was swept off his feet by the physical attractiveness of Zaynab. (Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, pp. 330, 331).

Furthermore the marriage caused no rift between Muhammad and Zaid and he remained loyal to Muhammad until his death on the battlefield at Muta. "One of the greatest tests of the Prophet's purity is that Zaid never swerved from his devotion to his master" (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 236). It is, however, hard to find a motive for the marriage if the attractiveness of this woman for Muhammad is denied altogether and it must be presumed that he had a deep spirit of affection for her. In his favour we must also remember that he steadfastly encouraged Zaid to keep her as his wife even when Zaid expressed a desire to divorce her. On the balance of probabilities Muhammad must be acquitted of the charge that he caused the divorce and took advantage of it to satisfy his own whims and desires.

As pointed out already, what shocked the Arabs was the fact that Muhammad had married within the customary prohibited degrees of relationship.

One point is tolerably certain, and that is the reason for the criticism of Muhammad's action by his contemporaries. They were not moved in the slightest by what some Europeans have regarded as the sensual and voluptuous character of his behaviour . . . in their eyes it was incestuous. (Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, p. 330).

A Western writer says of the Arab scruple about the marriage of a man to his adopted son's ex-wife: This custom was such as Muhammad had every reason to abolish, and this he actually did (Roberts, *The Social Laws of the Qur'an*, p. 49). The Qur'an, in the verse quoted, states that God himself had ordained the marriage for the specific purpose of abolishing the Arab custom, but the writer just quoted views the matter as purely incidental to the predicament Muhammad found himself in through his marriage with Zaynab:

It will thus be seen that the only reference made by the prophet to the matter of adoption is due entirely to self-interest; the desire to set himself right with his followers in the affair regarding Zainab. (Roberts, *The Social Laws of the Qur'an*, p. 51).

It is possible that Zaynab was the real pursuer in this case as she boasted constantly to Zaid of Muhammad's expression of favour towards her. After the marriage she continued in much the same vein as she boasted to the other wives of the prophet that *her* marriage alone had been ratified in heaven (Stobart, *Islam and its Founder*, p. 162). She was obviously very keen to marry Muhammad and found much comfort in the verse quoted where God is alleged to have arranged her marriage: "We joined her in marriage to thee". Muhammad apparently spent much time with her and it is hardly surprising to find his youngest wives, Ayishah and Hafsa, beholding the relationship between them with some jealousy (Zaynab was much older than both of them).

Narrated Aisha: Allah's Apostle used to drink honey in the house of Zainab, the daughter of Jahsh, and would stay there with her. So Hafsa and I agreed secretly that, if he come to either of us, she would say to him: It seems you have eaten Maghafir (a kind of bad-smelling resin), for I smell in you the smell of Maghafir. We did so and he replied No, but I was drinking honey in the house of Zainab, the daughter of Jahsh, and I shall never take it again. I have taken an oath as to that, and you should not tell anybody about it. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p. 404).

Muhammad loved perfumes and sweet-smelling spices but despised garlic and the like and this charge must have been keenly felt by him. One feels inclined to treat this tradition with some caution, however,

as it may well have been invented, or more probably adjusted, to fit the permission given to Muhammad in Surah 66.2 to absolve himself from an oath taken to please his wives. As we shall see in the next part of this section, the verse has generally been taken to refer to a far more serious matter relating to another wife where the same consorts Ayishah and Hafsa again teamed up against him. It is not uncommon to find traditions in Bukhari's *Sahih* which are very similar in style to others in earlier *Sirat* literature but which neatly remove any details considered to be dishonouring to Muhammad. We will come across another in the section on Surah 53.19 to follow but at this stage, insofar as this tradition contains the germ of an incident in Muhammad's life, it does illustrate the spirit in which his youngest wives reacted to his subsequent marriages.

Muhammad's marriage with Zaynab nevertheless exposes him to censure when it is viewed from a Christian perspective. At the same time the Qur'an also exposes itself to critical review in its sanction of the whole affair. As we have seen, Surah 33.37 states that, even while Zaid was still married to Zaynab, it was the will of Allah that Muhammad should be married to her and he is reproved for encouraging Zaid to remain married when God had something else in mind.

At last Zaid divorced her. It was not Zaid who did so but it was the Will of God. God ordered Muhammad to marry her. (Sarwar, *Muhammad: the Holy Prophet*, p. 375).

This contrasts most unfavourably with the express will of God as stated in the Bible: "For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel" (Malachi 2.16). It is most significant that this decree is upheld in the Hadith as well:

Ibn Umar reported the Prophet (may peace be upon him) as saying: Of all the lawful acts the most detestable to Allah is divorce. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 2, p. 585).

One is reminded of the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees where the latter claimed that God had made divorce lawful. Jesus answered that, from the beginning, God had made one woman for the one man, adding "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10.9).

Muhammad married a woman divorced from her husband. Sarwar says that this was not just lawful in God's eyes but was his express will. This is extremely hard to believe of the all-holy God who hates divorce. On the contrary, Muhammad's marriage with Zaynab takes on a very different perspective and becomes exceptionally censurable when examined in the light of what Jesus said about precisely such marriages:

He who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. *Luke 16.18*

Surah 33.37, far from revealing that God specifically wills certain divorces so that his prophets may marry the wives of other men, appears to be a thoroughly unwarranted relaxation of God's express laws, also set forth very firmly in these verses:

A married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives ... accordingly she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive.
Romans 7.2,3.

Muhammad may not deserve the charge that he had a passionate desire for Zaynab and schemed his marriage with her, but his claim to prophethood does well appear to fall to the ground when this matter is considered in the light of the revealed law of God as found in the Christian Bible. Under that same light the Qur'an also appears to invalidate its claim to be the Word of God when it seeks to excuse the whole affair by alleging that it was all according to the predetermined will of God.

3. The Jealousy of Muhammad's Wives.

At least nine of Muhammad's wives survived him. The Qur'an only allows Muslims up to four wives at a time (Surah 4.3), but Muhammad was entitled to as many as he chose until the Qur'an forbade him to take any more (Surah 33.52). As already mentioned, polygamy, as sanctioned and approved in the Qur'an, has been regarded in non-Muslim circles as one of the weaknesses of Islam. Sensitive to any charge against the infallibility of the teaching of their religion and the practice of their prophet, Muslim writers invariably seek to justify polygamy. The Qur'anic verse allowing up to four wives adds the condition "If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (a captive) that your right hands possess" (Surah 4.3), and the argument usually put forward is that polygamy is perfectly in order provided the wives are given equal treatment. As Muhammad had many wives he is often strongly defended against the allegation that he could not have treated them equally. The surest way to discover the truth of the matter is not to ask whether he himself was persuaded that they were so treated, but to enquire from his wives whether they ever felt any jealousy for one another or whether any friction was caused by their very number in the household. One writer claims:

But did any one of them ever raise the least complaint about any action of the Prophet during or after his lifetime? No, never. Can there be any bigger testimony to the Prophet's justice, equality (Masawat), love and consideration? (Zain, *The Prophet of Islam: The Ideal Husband*, p. 42).

A study of the evidences shows that this statement is based on the author's idealism rather than historical facts for there are many traditions recording that Muhammad's wives were jealous of one another and not always pleased with him either. Indeed on one occasion he kept aloof from them for a while and threatened to divorce them all.

We have already seen that Ayishah and Hafsa expressed some displeasure to Muhammad over the length of time he spent with Zaynab bint Jahsh. Being the youngest of his wives, it is not surprising that they were usually at the heart of Muhammad's domestic problems. Indeed Umar, Hafsa's father, not only found that Muhammad's wives argued with him quite regularly but even suspected that his daughter envied Ayishah as well because Muhammad clearly regarded her as his favourite wife. He was prompted to enquire into the relationship between Hafsa and Muhammad by a sharp remark made by his own wife on one occasion to him:

She said, How strange you are, O son of al-Khattab! You don't want to be argued with whereas your daughter, Hafsa surely, argues with Allah's Apostle so much that he remains angry for a full day! Umar then reported how he at once put on his outer garment and went to Hafsa and said to her "O my daughter! Do you argue with Allah's Apostle so that he remains angry the whole day?" Hafsa answered By Allah, we argue with him. Umar said Know that I warn you of Allah's punishment and the anger of Allah's Apostle. O my daughter! Don't be betrayed by the one who is proud of her beauty because of the love of Allah's Apostle for her (i.e. Aisha). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p. 406).

It was Muhammad's custom to spend one day at a time with his wives in order but on one occasion the irrepressible Hafsa discovered him with Mariyah in her own apartment on the day properly reserved for her alone. A Muslim writer is refreshingly frank in his narrative of this incident:

As she waited for them to come out, her jealousy broke all bounds. When, finally, Mariyah left the quarters and Hafsa entered, she said to the Prophet: "I have seen who was here. By God, that was an insult to me. You would not have dared to do that if I amounted to anything at all in your eyes". At the moment Muhammad realized that such deep-lying jealousy might even move Hafsa to broadcast what she had seen among the other wives. In an attempt to please her, Muhammad promised that he would not go unto Mariyah if she

would only refrain from broadcasting what she had seen. (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 436).

He goes on to say that Hafsah could not keep her promise as jealousy continued to affect her disposition and that she discussed the matter with Ayishah. The only thing he omits from the story is the statement made by all the commentators who record it that the promise made by Muhammad was actually in the form of an oath. They add that Muhammad was later freed from this oath by a Qur'anic revelation:

O Prophet! Why holdest thou to be forbidden that which God has made lawful to thee? Thou seekest to please thy consorts. But God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. God has already ordained for you (O men), the dissolution of your oaths (in some cases); and God is your Protector, and He is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom. *Surah 66.1-2*.

Bukhari and others say that this verse refers to the incident where Muhammad was told that the honey he had eaten with Zaynab smelt like a bitter herb. One must take seriously the fact that the story about Muhammad's vow to avoid Mariyah's company in future is not recorded in the major Hadith and Sirat literature but only in later commentaries and is therefore founded on weak historical authority. This has prompted a Muslim writer to say that the whole story of Mariyah's intimacy with Muhammad in Hafsah's apartment on her day is absolutely false and malicious and that it is repudiated by all the respectable commentators of the Koran (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 235).

On the other hand this story has come down purely through Islamic sources and could hardly have been widely accepted within the Islamic heritage if it had been invented. Unfortunately the Qur'an is somewhat vague at this point, saying only that the sanction to dissolve the oath arose out of the disclosure by one of Muhammad's wives to another of a matter of confidence (Surah 66.3) told by him to the first. This could refer to either story and, although Bukhari confirms that the two wives spoken of were the provocative young consorts Hafsah and Ayishah (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p. 408), this also does not help as it was these two who were the participants in both cases. A Western writer, however, makes a very interesting observation:

But the jealousy of Mary's Sisters showed itself in a more serious way, and led to an incident in the Prophet's life which the biographers pass over in decent silence; and I should gladly have followed their example if the Coran itself had not accredited the facts and stamped them with unavoidable notoriety. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 413).

It is the Qur'an's treatment of the matter that makes it probable that the incident with Mariyah is really the one referred to. Firstly, if the oath spoken of was purely that relating to honey, it is hard to believe that such an issue would have been made of it in the Qur'an. One recent Muslim commentator notes the seriousness of the matter when he says "The sacred words imply that the matter was of great importance as to the principle involved, but that the details were not of sufficient importance for permanent record" (Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, p. 1569). The discreet omission of factual details in the Qur'anic passage, however, tends all the more to support the suggestion that a more sensitive matter was behind it.

Secondly, Surah 66.3 adds that Muhammad confirmed a part of the allegation made by the spouse and repudiated a part. Again, details are significantly omitted, but it is probable that Muhammad confirmed that he had been with Mariyah in Hafsah's apartment but denied having intercourse with her. It is hard to see how the confirming and repudiating of parts of the charge can be made to fit the somewhat petty story about the honey Muhammad had eaten with Zaynab.

Thirdly, the same verse states plainly that a matter purely between Muhammad and one of his wives was disclosed to another. This is inconsistent with the honey story as Ayishah and Hafsah were both well aware of the matter all along, having mutually conspired to mislead Muhammad. It does indeed seem that Surah 66.1-2 was a convenient revelation to enable Muhammad to break his vow not to go to Mariyah again. A Christian commentator says "From the Christian standpoint, he appears to have been

guilty of breaking a solemn vow, and that in order to gratify unholy passion" (Wherry, *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Qur'an*, Vol. 4, p. 158). The Bible gives a very solemn warning about the taking of oaths:

When you make a vow to the Lord your God you shall not be slack to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you. But if you refrain from vowing it shall be no sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth. *Deuteronomy 23.21-23*.

If God sanctions the breaking of a vow by one of his apostles, how can we be sure that he will be faithful to his own promises? Vows and oaths are sacred things, but Surah 66.1-2 seems to undermine the whole purpose and value of oaths.

Shortly after this a timely revelation in the Qur'an gave Muhammad the right to abandon the fixed sequence he had followed with his wives up to this time:

Thou mayest defer (the turn of) any of them that thou pleases, and thou mayest receive any thou pleases: and there is no blame on thee if thou invite one whose (turn) thou hadst set aside. *Surah 33.51*

Ayishah had openly complained of her jealousy towards those women (who are not named) who had "offered themselves to Allah's Messenger" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p. 748) and who gradually increased the size of the household as Muhammad under Qur'anic authority (Surah 33.50), duly took them as his wives (presumably Ayishah had at least Zaynab bint Jahsh and Juwayriyah in mind). As her own days to exclusively enjoy Muhammad's company grew further apart, her frustration naturally increased and when Muhammad claimed divine sanction to follow any sequence he chose, his young wife Ayishah, with a tongue as sharp as her wit, exclaimed:

I feel that your Lord hastens in fulfilling your wishes and desires". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p. 295).

It appears that his decision worked in her favour for the renowned commentator Zamakshari, commenting on Surah 3.49-52, says of Muhammad that he used to put off five temporarily in order to take four to himself, the four being Ayishah, Hafsa, Umm Salamah and Zaynab bint Jahsh (Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, p. 91). Despite this it is clear that Ayishah possessed no small degree of envy for the other wives she had to share her husband with. Her caustic reaction to Muhammad's marriage with Juwayriyah has already been noted and, when Mariyah at last gave Muhammad a son at Medina, Ayishah was anything but delighted. When Muhammad brought the infant Ibrahim to her and proudly boasted of the likeness between father and son, she coldly answered "I do not see it". William Muir wryly says that she "would gladly have put Mahomet out of conceit with the little Ibrahim" (*The Life of Mahomet*, p. 412).

4. Polygamy in Islam from a Christian Perspective.

One cannot help feeling that Ayishah's expressions of jealousy are perhaps the best judgment that can be passed on the whole defence that polygamy is justified where all the wives are treated equally. She was the only virgin Muhammad married and, although most traditions say that Muhammad married Sauda before her, she openly claimed that she was the first betrothed to him after the death of Khadija. She said of Sauda (whom she held in high esteem):

"She was the first woman whom he (Allah's Apostle) married after me". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p. 748).

If this was indeed so, then we need to appreciate the growing frustrations of a young virgin-bride seeing her husband taking other wives along with her in what must have seemed to her like an interminable procession of new weddings, apartments and the like.

The Christian Scriptures plainly teach that a husband is to regard his wife as his equal (Ephesians 5.33) and Jesus himself confirmed the divine decree that a man, married to his one wife, becomes one flesh with her (Matthew 19.5). When God saw that Adam needed a helpmeet he made but one woman for him, not four (or, worse still, nine). The point is that each man is not called upon to treat his wives equally with one another but to treat his one wife as his own equal. An equal relationship between a man and a woman cannot be shared with others. The woman is called to devote herself with unreserved loyalty to her one husband (Genesis 3.16). In the same manner the husband is called to an equal spirit of undivided love and devotion towards his one wife (Ephesians 5.25-31). It surely goes without saying that the husband cannot love his wife with an equal devotion when he has to divide his affection among a host of consorts.

Ayishah's frustrations and jealousies are the best proof that Muhammad could not treat his wives equally - if for no other reason that he did not regard her with the same total, undivided affection that she regarded him. She may have been his favourite wife but her grievances clearly were motivated, perhaps only sub-consciously, by the fact that she was not his *only* wife. Paradoxically, the fact that Muhammad singled her out as his favourite wife is further proof that he did not treat his wives equally. There is more than enough evidence in Muhammad's own marital affairs to prove that polygamy cannot ultimately be reconciled with God's perfect purpose for human marriage. It is no wonder that the perfect revelation of his will through the Gospel of his Son simultaneously outlawed polygamy. Muhammad had enjoyed a twenty-five year marriage with Khadija which was, in all respects, unimpeachable. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for his many marriages at Medina and one can only sympathise with the young Ayishah who obviously regretted that she could not enjoy the same undivided devotion from her husband that she willingly offered to him.

As said before, the Christian faith is the fullest revelation of God's perfect will for all men. Included in this revelation is a rejection of polygamy. As God made man to reflect his own glory, so he made one woman for the first man to reflect the glory of that man (1 Corinthians 11.7). Muhammad did well to preach and practice monotheism but he would have done equally well to preach and practice monogamy (Muhammad's form of "monotheism" was still very much a pagan concept. - Note by Ministry to Muslims). To this day Muslim writers are on the defensive when seeking to justify polygamy. One says:

All the Prophets of the Old Testament, married more wives than one, which is proof that polygamy is not inconsistent with the highest standard of spirituality. (Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets*, p. 61).

This argument falls down for reasons already given. The highest standard of spirituality was not revealed through the prophets in old covenant times but through the revelation of the new covenant in all its perfections as introduced by one who likewise far excelled all the prophets of old, Jesus Christ himself. Another writer is not quite as subtle in his apologetic for Muhammad - he says of the Zaynab affair Muhammad's violation was not one of a cosmic law but one of a social law, which is permissible to every great man (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 288). This is indeed a peculiar line of reasoning and one which exposes the writer's difficulty in justifying his Prophet's actions. Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived and his greatness did not give him the privilege of breaking God's laws but rather was proved in his perfect conformity to those laws in every aspect of his life. A more appropriate assessment of Muhammad's actions follows:

The Qur'an teaches us that in one or two matters the moral law was *relaxed* by God for Muhammad's benefit as a special privilege *because* of his being God's apostle and the

sanctity attaching to that high office! Could the divorce between Religion and Morality be more complete? (Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent*, p. 81).

Far from the marriages of Muhammad being proof that he was the ideal husband (as Zain puts it), they rather are evidence of an inherent weakness in Islamic morality.

Once more the thing that disquiets is that this is the man who stands forth as the ultimate ideal of humanity, and all the unedifying matters of Zainab, Miriam, Ayesha, Rihana, and the rest are dignified as the signs of God's special favour to His prophet. In manipulations of the marriage laws at which even sixteenth-century Popes of Rome drew the line, Allah showed the most accomodating spirit in seventh-century Arabia. (Gairdner, *The Reproach of Islam*, p. 67).

Although monogamy has become the norm in many Muslim societies today, this trend is not to Islam's credit but is rather a sign of the consciousness of God's real will for men and women and the best way in which a marriage can develop into a truly happy union. By taking to himself more than double the number of wives he allowed to his followers, Muhammad seems to have been something of a champion of polygamy rather than an advocate of monogamy and his tolerance of plural marriages, together with his schemes to rid himself of his personal enemies, negate his claim to be a true prophet of God. A Christian assessment of his character leaves him far short of the ideal - an ideal worked out to perfection in Jesus Christ - and the only conclusion to be drawn is that, despite his many qualities (NOTE: We cannot agree with the author that Muhammad had any "qualiyies" worthy of praise in light of his overwhelming acts of cruelty and inhumanity), he cannot be considered as the man God chose to be his best and final messenger to all mankind. That honour belongs to Jesus Christ alone.