

The Koran¹

By Jim Seghers

In Islam the Koran is believed to be the word-for-word dictation from God (Allah) to his greatest and final prophet Muhammad. The meaning of the Arabic word *koran* is “recitation.” The book is about eighty percent the size of the New Testament with 114 chapters called *suras*, which are subdivided into verses. In the year 610 A.D. Muhammad claimed that the angel Gabriel visited him with revelations from God. It is claimed that these revelations continued to his death. Muhammad believed that he was charged with the mission to call everyone to obey and worship Allah, the one true God. Muhammad verbally conveyed the messages from God to his companions, who memorized them or wrote them on scraps of parchment. The collection of these “revelations” into a single book occurred within twenty years of Muhammad’s death. This essay proposes to examine its historical credibility of the Koran.

This kind of critical examination is not permitted to Muslim scholars because the Koran is considered to be uncreated, eternal and immutable. To do so in a Muslim country would result in beheading or whatever death is currently decreed to blasphemous infidels. Therefore, the vital question asked here is never examined by Muslim scholars: Does the evidence support the belief that the Koran the product of God’s dictation? Curiously, the Koran is very insecure and defensive about its own authenticity. Numerous passages are devoted to this defense, a sampling of which is cited below:² Indeed, the Koran has literally hundreds of these defensive statements.

“Will they not ponder on the Koran? If it had not come from God they could have surely found in it many contradictions” (4:82).

“This is no invented tale, but a confirmation of previous scriptures . . .” (21:112).”

“This Book is beyond all doubt revealed by the Lord of the Universe.... Do they say: ‘He has invented it himself?’ (32:1-2).

Authenticity comes across as a chief preoccupation of the Koran. This is decidedly not true of either the Bible or any of the books of the Bible. The messages of the Bible are confident and self-assured. In contrast, Muhammad seems obsessed with his authority to the extent of frequently defending his own sanity, for example, “Your compatriot

1 This essay draws many of its ideas from William Kilpatrick’s insightful and thought provoking book *Christianity, Islam and Atheism: The Struggle for the Soul of the West*, Chapter 3, “Questioning the Koran,” pp. 109-124.

2 *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, p. 111.

[Muhammad] is not mad" (81:21). Serge Trifkovic concluded that the Koran "looks, feels, and sounds like a construct entirely human in origin and intent, clear in its earthly sources of inspiration and the fulfillment of the daily needs, personal and political, of its author."³

Clearly, Muhammad's frequent claim that his revelations were authentic does not establish that claim, especially when no one witnessed his revelations nor was his claim supported by miracles. Muslims often cite as a proof of authenticity, the claim that the Koran is a literary masterwork far beyond the capabilities of the illiterate prophet. The Koran itself makes a similar claim: "If you doubt what We have revealed to Our servant, produce one chapter comparable to it" (2:23).

It is true that in the Koran there are some beautiful flashes of poetry as well as some lyrical passages describing God's creation. However much of the Koran is tedious, repetitive, and didactic. In short, it falls far short of great literature. One might object, 'Well there are parts of the Bible that are tedious, repetitive, and didactic.' That is true, but the Bible never claims to be the word-for-word dictation from God. Men wrote the books of the Bible inspired by God, but that does not imply that they wrote in a divine style. Therefore, the literary merit of the Bible is not a critical issue.

Furthermore, even Arabic scholars admit that the Koran contains grammatical errors. As for its poetic passages, they resemble the poetry of Umayya ibn Abi al-Salt, who was a contemporary of Muhammad. Its prophetic passages merely echo the Old Testament. In spite of the claim of its direct divine authorship, the Koran does not transcend ancient literary forms, and it fails to match the literary skill of ancient human authors. This leads to the following question: How is it conceivable that human authors are able to express themselves more eloquently than God himself?

There is, however, a more profound question. What does the Koran have to reveal? The honest answer is, very little that is new. When examined critically and objectively the Koran appears to have borrowed the substance of its ideas from the Old Testament, the Talmud, apocryphal Christian writings, and the literary works of Zoroastrians and Hindus. The charge that Muhammad's prophecies were nothing more than hand-me-downs was a criticism voiced from the beginning of Muhammad's career. This complaint is even recorded in the Koran: "Whenever Our revelations are recited to them, they say: 'We

³ *The Sword of the Prophet: Islam, History, Theology, Impact on the World*, p. 82.

have heard them (before). If we wished, we could say the like. They are but fables of the ancients” (8:31).

The Koran stresses that God is one and the necessity of obedience to his will, but this was hardly a new revelation. The only new revelation is the unsubstantiated claim that Muhammad is the latest, greatest and last prophet. Therefore, he ought to be believed and obeyed. The Koran does give rules for prayer, fasting, charity, dealing with other tribes, and the relations with ones wives. Once again, there is nothing significantly new here that distinguishes it from existing practices of the period.

In addition to its lack of originality, the Koran is utterly lacking in coherence. There is no beginning, middle, and end because the chapters are arranged from the longest to the shortest. Not only does this make it impossible to establish a chronological order, but often there is no logical connection between paragraphs. Apparently, Allah did not find it necessary to connect his thoughts.

It’s amusing to consider the creative way one Muslim apologist defends the Koran’s discontinuity: “The Qur’an is like a montage of different images or a kaleidoscope, in which different elements recur but in different arrangements.”⁴ However, Thomas Carlyle’s evaluation is quite different: “A wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; most crude, incondite;-- insupportable stupidity, in short!”⁵

Jesus never claimed to be a prophet. He claimed to be the culmination of all prophecies. Muhammad stated that Christ was a great prophet in a line of prophets leading up to the greatest of all the prophets, Muhammad himself. But nowhere in the New Testament is there even a hint of a prophet like Muhammad coming after Jesus, unless one includes Jesus’ warnings about false prophets. Even in the so-called hidden gospels of the Gnostics, there is no mention of Muhammad. “Muslim apologists insist that in the original, untampered-with, and long-lost version of some gospels, Jesus does prophesy the coming of Muhammad. But no document of this description exists, and there is no evidence that it every did.”⁶

4 Malcolm Clark, *Islam for Dummies*, p. 109.

5 *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, Chapter 2, “The Hero as Prophet,” <http://www.online-literature.com>.

6 *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, p. 121.

Finally, there is a world of difference between the Jesus of the New Testament and uninspiring stick figure of Christ portrayed in the Koran. They have nothing in common; neither does the essential messages contained in these two books. Christianity is not a religion of a book, not even a divinely inspired book. It is the religion of the Word of God, who assumed human nature on order to save us by his self-sacrificing love. The men who listened to his teaching, saw his miracles, and testified to the fact of his Resurrection set out to convert the world by the courageous witness of their lives, not by military conquest.

It is surprising that many intellectuals in the West fail to examine the creditability of the Koran and naively equate the Koran with the Bible. The differences are, indeed, radical, but many of these men and women are trapped in the narrow confines of their multiculturalist philosophy and relativism, which blinds them to the existence of objective truth, and absolute good and evil. This is a subject worth exploring in a future essay.