



# Prophets in Parallel: Mohammed and Ellen G. White

Adventism and Islam share a respect for the prophetic gift.

by Hugh Dunton

ANYONE ATTEMPTING TO WRITE A COMPARISON between the work of Mohammed and Ellen G. White is faced with a number of hard choices, to say nothing of the possible loss of friends.

First, if one accepts either of the prophets on his or her own declarations, there is only one way of salvation. Neither way permits much flexibility, if any. To move to a position of religious pluralism is to go beyond what either of the protagonists believed. A pluralist view would therefore be almost a "higher revelation," and falsify the original messages.

Second, arising from the first issue is the painful alternative of deciding that one or the other was a false prophet. It is not easy to deal deeply and sensitively with both prophets, believing one to be the messenger of Allah/God, and the other to be speaking with another voice.

Third, if one of the prophets was deceived,

was it by evil forces? Here a writer verges on blasphemy in suggesting this explanation for the prophet in the eyes of Adventist or Muslim.

Fourth, it is tempting to use a reductionist approach that will attribute the work of both Mohammed and Ellen White to the psychological forces within or upon them. Attempts have been made to write psycho-medical histories of both. This approach gets us nowhere in Muslim-Adventist dialogue. A reductionist approach leaves us with only individual, or sometimes group, psychological phenomena. Moreover, the whole of religious experience, even of a less charismatic form, would soon be encompassed in such a scheme.

## Milieu and Work of the Prophets

The Old Testament prophet was *nabiy*, an inspired person.<sup>1</sup> Mohammed has the cognate title *naby*, one whose mission lies within the framework of an existing religion.

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He is also called *rasul*, messenger or envoy, a prophet who brings a new revelation or a new religion.<sup>2</sup> Both John the Baptist and Jesus are spoken of as prophets. Our Lord gave the title to John.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was called a prophet, but never specifically applied the title to himself.<sup>4</sup>

The New Testament indicates that prophets—male and female—and prophecy were a recognized part of the worshiping community of Christians.<sup>5</sup> Jesus warned of false prophets in the church,<sup>6</sup> and both the *Didache* and *Hermes* give directions for detecting such false prophets.<sup>7</sup> The Catholic tradition assumes that prophetism died out in the early church, “its final decline caused by Montanism with its exaggerated emphasis on the prophetic gift.”<sup>8</sup>

The *kabin* (compare the Hebrew *kohen*) or soothsayers were common in Arabia. Although Mohammed may have shared some of the traits of the *kabin*, he himself was not one of them. There seems to have been an expectation in the air that some great events were about to happen.<sup>9</sup>

Tongues and prophecies seem to arise in the Christian church at periods of extraordinary expectation, notably relating to the Second Advent, as in the case of the Irvingite ecstasies.<sup>10</sup> Ellen White, when only 17, received her first vision after the Millerite disappointment of October 1844. She had lived through the exaltation and the despair of that experience. She was one of at least six people, all but two female, among the Millerites who claimed to have visions.

The conservative understanding of the work

of prophets has several parts:

- The message is given by God, either by thought inspiration or verbal inspiration.
- The message is more than an encounter between the prophet and God.
- Propositional truth is conveyed.

Some parts of Scripture claim to be the direct word of the Lord through the prophet. Other books are histories or stories. The canon of both the Old and New Testaments took many years to evolve, with the Apocrypha achieving a twilight status.

The use of Aramaic as well as Hebrew in the

book of Daniel suggests that the *language* of revelation is not a critical factor. The translation into Greek, the Septuagint, showed that the message of Yahweh was not confined to a particular language. The message could be carried over into another tongue, even at the danger that some nuances would be lost. The incarnational model of Scripture is that God’s Word can appear among people in a familiar and

intelligible guise, an extension of John 1:14.<sup>11</sup>

The Adventist “pioneers” insisted on the *sola scriptura* principle. The use of the Revised Version of 1881 and the 1883 revision of the *Testimonies* indicated that Ellen White and the General Conference did not believe in verbal inspiration, but such beliefs were held by some Adventists, even after 1883.<sup>12</sup> Ellen White clearly denied verbal inspiration for the Bible and for herself, and pointed out the difference between common matters and spiritual issues. She encouraged translation and authorized compilations of her work.<sup>13</sup>

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By contrast, the Muslim believes that

the revelation of the Koran was the ordering of the Prophet's soul in the form of sacred words acceding to the Divine Command to God's disposition of things. Once the re-ordering took place, the stories of the Koran were no longer stories of a particular time and place, but became archetypal situations of past, future and present which were mysteriously oriented so as to reflect the Divine Unity from whichever direction one approached them. Through the new arrangement became visible a celestial Koran which was in essence the untreated word of God.<sup>14</sup>

The Koran cannot be translated. It was revealed by God in a form of Arabic, which, though closely corresponding to the refined usage of Mecca, "cannot be equated with it, for in every respect the Koran is subject to no rule, to no measure, to no standard; it is itself its own law."<sup>15</sup> The language of the Koran is part of the revelation in a way that the language of the Bible or Ellen White is not. "It is a fundamental doctrine of Islam that the Koran, as the speech of god, is eternal and untreated in its essence and sense, created in its letter and sounds. . . ."<sup>16</sup> The text is regarded by Islamic believers, including devout scholars, "as immutable and unchangeable, not metaphorically or symbolically, but literally." "Even Mohammed could not change a word of it."<sup>17</sup> Yet there remains the problem, for some, of the abrogations. However, these are not the work of the prophet. "Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?"<sup>18</sup> Variant readings, recognized as of equal authority, arise from the fact that the kufic script in which the Koran was originally written contained no indication of vowels or diacritical points.<sup>19</sup>

The Koranic text is a primary document, the normative revelation, to be learned by

heart and to be recited. There is virtue in the recitation, and considerable skill is involved in reciting well. The structure and rhythms of the text are significant, and recitation is both a religious observation and a sacred art form. There could be no question of in any way tampering with the text. Only by inflection or emphasis could a reciter in any way color the sense of the text. In this sense the Koran represents an oral culture, while Ellen White worked in a written culture.<sup>20</sup> The Koran does not illuminate a previous revelation as Ellen White does; it surpasses the Bible. It is in one sense the Koran, and the Koran only, yet there is the mass of the prophet's sayings collected in the *Hadith*, and the *Sunnah*, or tradition.<sup>21</sup> Mohammed may have been influenced by, or should we rather say, built upon, pre-existing systems, but Jesus and certainly Ellen White did not start from nothing. In each case we may say that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.<sup>22</sup>

## Call of the Prophets

ABOUT the year 610, Mohammed was meditating, when on the "night of power" or "destiny," the angel Gabriel first spoke to him, the Koran was revealed, and the divine mission began.<sup>23</sup> In one sense the revelation was completed in one night, but Allah did not give the spoken record at one time. In this sense, the revelation continued sporadically over a number of years. To charges that the events mentioned in the Koran do not always agree with the biblical or historical record, it may be pointed out that "sacred history is a secondary preoccupation; the subject of the Koran is above all the Divine Nature and the means of salvation."<sup>24</sup>

Ellen G. White received knowledge through visions and dreams. She had one very significant dream before her first vision, but she did not consider that dream to be the start of her

prophetic experience. That commenced with the first vision in December of 1844. As she developed in experience, the number of visions declined, but she continued to have impressive and revelatory dreams, and from time to time sensed the divine presence very strongly.

There is some evidence that Mohammed sought to induce revelation after his early experiences, but Allah rebuked him.<sup>25</sup> Ellen White never, as far as the record goes, sought to induce an ecstatic experience, for she knew that a vision would mean she might have to carry rebuke to someone. This she found painful. Ellen White did not need external human stimuli to induce a vision. Rodinson compares Mohammed's experience with that of St. Teresa of Avila.<sup>26</sup> Could Ellen White's experience be so compared? Adventists would be reluctant to do this, as it raises the question of whether a true revelation can teach or condone error.

Do prophets seek their vocation? Amos 7:14, 15, and Jeremiah 1:6 clearly say no. Ellen White did not seek visions, although she had a hunger for God.<sup>27</sup> Mohammed was seeking for a deeper experience, although he may not have fully known what he sought. He was a *hanif* and like Isaiah, was in a place or attitude of prayer when he received the revelation.<sup>28</sup>

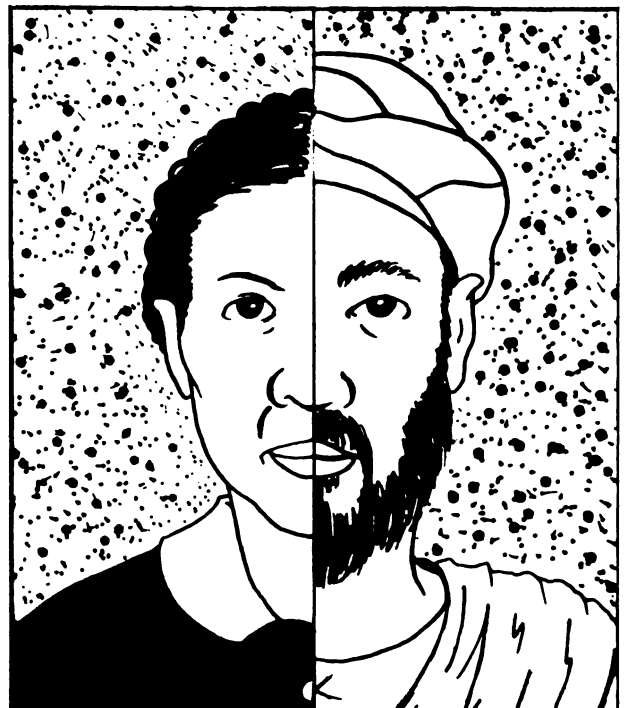
Ellen White did not deny the prophetic gift, but her work encompassed much more than that of a prophet. She was instructed that she was the Lord's *messenger*.<sup>29</sup> As noted above, Mohammed was both *naby* and *rasul* (messenger). As the *words* came direct from Allah, Mohammed was spared the task, which Ellen White found difficult, of putting thoughts from God into human speech.

Both Mohammed and Ellen White had limited education. It is uncertain whether Mohammed was literate, but he did not claim supernatural power in writing down the messages. The miracle was in the utterance, not the writing. That was done by *amenuenses*,

men who wrote down the prophet's words. The important editorial work was not so much altering the text as arranging the suras in a particular order. The very strong oral tradition, with the emphasis on the value of recitation, would have ensured the relative purity of the text.

Ellen White recognized that she was not a scholar, and her first writing was corrected for spelling and grammar by James White. The student can gain an impression of her style and literary skills in looking at the earliest original manuscripts. Some literary assistants, notably Marian Davis, were more than correctors of spelling and grammar. White called Davis her "bookmaker," responsible for the compilation of earlier Ellen White writings to form new books. This work was done under the guidance of Ellen White herself, but the greatest Ellen White classics combine the inspiration of Ellen White plus the industry, but not the thoughts, of Marian Davis.

Mohammed lived in a period of social and political turmoil. There were prophets before him.<sup>30</sup> He may have shown extraordinary spiritual awareness in his childhood.<sup>31</sup> He was



married to a woman 15 years older than himself, in a society where there were plenty of young women available, but not to him. He had no male child, and was therefore an *abtar*, mutilated one. Conscious of his abilities, he was not yet stretched. He made retreats to the cave in the hill of Hira for the all-night vigils already practiced by some *banifs*, monotheists, belonging neither to Judaism or Christianity. After his call, he occasionally went through periods of "anguished doubt,"<sup>32</sup> but he does not appear to have suffered from the strong melancholic and introspective tendencies of Ellen White. However, there is a little direct autobiographical material for Mohammed.<sup>33</sup>

Critics of Ellen White have looked for non-supernatural causes for her visions. Mesmerism was the earliest charge. Physical explanations were sought later, for example, some form of epileptic seizure.<sup>34</sup> The reductionist would argue that Ellen White's precocious spirituality was a sign of abnormality. How much did this spiritual hunger predate her accident? Is the increased spirituality causally or coincidentally linked, i.e., the spiritual struggles developed as she grew, unrelated to her invalid state? Here believers in divine revelation may have to admit that they do not fully understand how the divine and the human interact. Physical debility may be used by deity as a path to the soul. The onset of puberty may also have awakened deeper emotions.

Graham's discussion of "The Psychic Individual" provides an analysis with which the work of both Ellen White and Mohammed can be examined in various facets.<sup>35</sup> Possibly those to whom extraordinary revelations of the supernatural are given are themselves unusual personalities. This is not in itself a reductionist approach, but the devout believer then is faced with the question of whether the "psychic individual" may receive false messages, for only a highly relativist approach can reconcile the revelations given to Mohammed

and to Ellen White.

Little is said concerning physical phenomena in connection with Mohammed. The fact that the revelation was given is the significant fact, not the phenomena that accompanied it. The prophet was physically and emotionally shaken by the "Night of Power," and we are told that "the camel upon which [he] . . . was mounted during the [last] sermon buckled under the numinous weight which often came upon the Prophet when the Spirit settled upon him."<sup>36</sup> Modern Adventists do not emphasize the physical phenomena accompanying Ellen White's visions, regarding them as significant for the time, but not proof of genuineness.

## Authority of the Prophets

Ellen White vigorously rebutted the idea that there are degrees of inspiration in the Bible, which would incidentally have suggested different degrees of inspiration within her own writings.<sup>37</sup> While she does not claim that any doctrine is founded upon her writings, she does claim that doctrines that the Spirit of God had endorsed with power are not to be tampered with.<sup>38</sup> To this extent, Ellen White may be said to have considered her writing to be normative for doctrine on some basic issues, such as the sanctuary, the Sabbath, the condition of the dead, and the three angels' messages, but only in the sense that these are Bible-based. She never claimed infallibility, but did state that there was no heresy in what she had written, and that though she might die, "these messages are immortalized."<sup>39</sup>

If Ellen White were the infallible interpreter, would this mean, *de facto*, that she was placed above Scripture, a "Third Testament," a role analogous to tradition within Catholicism? Ellen White wrote primarily for Seventh-day Adventists (the *ummah!*), and her work is not to be used to demonstrate or support Advent-

ist beliefs to non-Adventists.<sup>40</sup>

Did Mohammed claim to set an example of how to act? "The importance of the Sunnah (the spoken and acted example of the Prophet), arises from the function of the Prophet as the founder of the religion, and hence the inspired and provident nature of his acts, and the Koran's injunction to pattern oneself after him. 'You have a good example in God's messenger.'"<sup>41</sup>

People held up Ellen White as an example, either to emulate or criticize. She liked neither role.<sup>42</sup> She recognized that she was a sinner and did not at all draw attention to herself, except sometimes to rebut slanderous charges of misconduct or inconsistency.

Mohammed's many roles ensured that he would be consulted on many issues. After he had given some wrong advice concerning grafting date palms, he said, "I am a mere human being. When I command you to do anything about religion in the name of God, accept it, but when I give my personal opinion about worldly things, bear in mind that I am a human being and no more."<sup>43</sup> After his death, his work, both in the Koran and the collections of the Hadith, provided ongoing guidance for the community.

Ellen White was given the role of counselor in a variety of situations and problems in the *Testimonies* and in personal conversation. There were limits to what she saw as her authority. She could make mistakes on mundane matters. The sheer volume of work facing Ellen White was formidable. Members were using her as a shortcut to guidance when

they should be consulting the Bible, fasting, and praying. This attitude encouraged mental and spiritual laziness. She was not a guru, dispensing her own wisdom. She pointed to the source of wisdom. Where God gave her light, she would speak. Where she had no God-given information she would usually refuse to give her own opinion, lest it be taken for divine counsel. She did make a distinction between "common" matters, and spiritual issues.

Seventh-day Adventists may find themselves in a tension between a literal reading of the biblical and Ellen White statements on geochronology and origins, and the generally accepted scientific view.<sup>44</sup> Many Christians have sought a reconciliation between the Bible and science, and there is a wide spectrum of Adventist attitudes toward a strict interpretation of the Ellen White scientific statements. There is also among many Muslims an ability to live with the tensions

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between the claims of science and the statements of the Koran. In both faith communities there are those who posit two different realities, the religious and the scientific; who believe there can be no contradiction, for religion and science each describe distinct realities.

In his last year in Mecca, during the month of Ramadan, Mohammed experienced a nocturnal ascent to heaven, even to the presence of God himself. Was this a bodily or spiritual experience? As Nasr points out, "the *miraj* journey to the higher states of being and not simply through astronomical space," is one of the most difficult elements in Islam for adher-

ents of the modern scientific world view to accept.<sup>45</sup>

As far as the *miraj* is concerned it refers to a journey to the higher states of being and not simply through astronomical space. The ascension of the Blessed Prophet *physically* as well as psychologically and spiritually, meant that all the elements of his being were integrated in that final experience which was the full realization of unity (*al-tawhid*).<sup>46</sup>

Islamic scholars do not agree as to the literality of the *miraj*. Some use the “economy of miracle” principle, and do not assume the miraculous beyond what the prophet actually states, or what very strong evidence supports. There is a tendency for lives of great and holy people to be embroidered with marvels. The reaction comes later, when in the course of demythologizing, not only the excrescences, but the core of truth may be questioned. The vision may be compared with Ellen White’s visions of heaven. So far as I have read, no one has suggested that Ellen White was physically transported in her visions. The body was actually there for the congregation to view in many cases. “While I was praying at the family altar, the Holy Ghost fell upon me, and I seemed to be rising higher and higher, far above the dark world.”<sup>47</sup>

The word *seemed* implies that the experience was a vision, not some form of physical journey. However, she writes as an active participant in *future events*. Two *dreams* occurred in 1842, two years before the first visions. She wrote, “I seemed to be sitting . . . ,” but then the narrative proceeds as if the events had actually taken place, as in the visions.<sup>48</sup> These celestial visions, or journeys, invite comparison with Paul’s experience. “Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know” (RSV). Ellen White uses this as a test of whether a prophecy may be genuine. She did

not define her own experience.<sup>49</sup>

Mohammed is by title and definition the “Last Prophet.” There can be no revelation beyond him. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) was by definition a false prophet since he came after Mohammed.<sup>50</sup> Ellen White did not claim to be the last of the prophets, though she was the prophet of the end time. The arguments used by her supporters would not rule out a successor, but Ellen White herself never encouraged the idea that there would be a successor. If she should die before the Advent, her writings would continue to speak.<sup>51</sup> There were those who claimed to have visions during Mrs. White’s ministry. She dismissed their claims not because she claimed the exclusive right to be the messenger to the remnant, but because the Lord had not called these other claimants; their messages did not bear the stamp of heaven.<sup>52</sup>

## Teachings of the Prophets

Most of Mohammed’s teaching is concerned with righteous living in the world as preparation for the next. Paul Gordon notes that it has been estimated that “less than five percent of [Ellen White’s] writings contain a predictive element.” Here Gordon notes that false prophets make prediction their major claim for attention.<sup>53</sup> What Gordon says is correct concerning Ellen White and prediction. However, in traditional popular Adventism, the predictive element has featured quite prominently, as members study for signs of the eschaton.

The Islamic moral code was a restriction of the laxity of the prophet’s own time. It may be compared with the law of Moses, which allowed the less than ideal, but was an advance on the mores of the surrounding nations, and of the conditions that slavery would have imposed upon the Israelites. Mohammed is very frank and approving of sex within a

legal framework, although passion could be a disturbing force.<sup>54</sup> There is strong concern for the poor (*sadaqa*, or charity), condemnation of usury,<sup>55</sup> and gambling.<sup>56</sup>

Ellen White had to write in the guarded language of her time. She has therefore appeared to some to be anti-sex. The erotic element in marriage could be suggested only in euphemisms, and her cultural background would suggest that the subject would not be high on her personal agenda. The Song of Solomon was allegorized, and the Bible describes the afterlife mainly in terms of a restored Israel, but without a paradise of sensual pleasures. Ellen White's new earth has many physical activities, but she specifically ruled out marriage, on the authority of Christ's own words. She was not anti-marriage, although she believed many marriages were unhappy, and the sensual played too great a part. Ellen White denounces sharp dealing and all forms of dishonesty, the *suggestio falsi*, as well as outright deception. She was active against slavery and denounced hard bargains, especially with the poor.<sup>57</sup> Both she and Mohammed had a concern for orphans.<sup>58</sup>

Islam is a way of life, with distinctive conduct, dress codes, diet, social, economic and political laws (the Shariah) and exclusivity. Adventists vary in attitude from seeing themselves as the remnant, with all other Christian bodies as "fallen churches," through a milder *ecclesiola in ecclesia* view to a de-emphasis on the differences between Adventist and other Christian communions. This shift has gone so far as to permit some Adventists to question whether there may be salvation through Islam, *faute de mieux*. Islam set itself up as a theocracy. The remnant church could not aim at that since the very remnant concept implies a minority that would remain politically powerless. Adventists have strongly endorsed the separation of church and state, and the principle of liberty of conscience. God's kingdom is not to be set up by human beings,

but by God.<sup>59</sup> Augustine and Mohammed believed in coercion. Adventists stand in the Anabaptist tradition.

Mohammed allowed his followers to wash with sand before prayers, if no water was available. There were exceptions to not fighting in the holy month. Prayers might be shortened if there was a fear that unbelievers might attack. Unclean food might be eaten if hunger constrained.<sup>60</sup> The Koran, like the Levitical law, does not go into distinctions between unclean and unhealthy.

Ellen White was flexible in health practices. It is clear that for her it is a *health* issue and not a distinction between clean and unclean in a *ceremonial* sense.<sup>61</sup>

"Those who offend God and His Prophet will be damned in this world and the next." "Those who despise the Koran as" 'Old fictitious tales!' "shall bear the full brunt of their burdens on the Day of Resurrection."<sup>62</sup> Those who reject the *Testimonies* face spiritual loss, slighting the Holy Spirit. Those who despise or reject the *Testimonies*, leave the church. The final work of the deceiver will be to make the *Testimonies* of no effect.<sup>63</sup>

There are difficult things in Scripture, as Peter acknowledged. Ellen White presents Adventists with some hard sayings, antinomies, some of which arise from her adaptation of counsel to individual cases. One could, as with Scripture, compile a *Sic et Non* from her writings. In the Koran there are the mysterious letters at the beginning of certain suras. Most Islamic scholars are content to say reverently, "Allah alone knows what He means by these letters."<sup>64</sup>

## Practices of the Prophets

Both Ellen White and Mohammed have been accused of inconsistency, and the worst construction has been placed on these apparent inconsistencies. Ellen White was not



as rapid and thorough as she might have been in adopting vegetarianism. Part of the problem was her frequent traveling, when one had to eat what was available. It took time to define clean and unclean, or healthful and unhealthful, using the distinctions of Leviticus 11 as a guide. Ellen White died with debts, although she had counseled both individuals and institutions to shun debt as they would shun leprosy. Royalties anticipated from her works were to offset these debts.

Muslims are allowed four wives,<sup>65</sup> but the prophet himself had at least nine. "This privilege is yours alone, being granted to no other believer."<sup>66</sup> It has been pointed out that some of these arrangements were made to provide homes for the widows of supporters killed in battle. If Mohammed did indeed visit all nine in one night, does that demonstrate that he showed equal concern for them so that they would not feel second-class wives, rather than lust? The story is Hadithic, not Koranic.<sup>67</sup> Some of the Old Testament heroes might have understood this more than Christian saints.

Both Ellen White and Mohammed have been accused of having "convenient" revelations to suit their own purposes. Mohammed was able to circumvent the taboo against marrying the widow of a son, by a revelation that distinguished between relationship by blood and adoption.<sup>68</sup> Ellen White has been accused of having a vision to avoid explaining difficulties in her work. On examination, the charge fails.<sup>69</sup> It has also been asserted that Ellen White was influenced to

write testimonies by the brethren who wanted her authority for what they thought needed to be done, especially in fundraising.<sup>70</sup>

Mohammed did not claim to work miracles, although the splitting of the moon is mentioned in the Koran.<sup>71</sup> Legends grew up attributing miracles to him, "but there is nothing conclusive in their nature; they play no part in Islamic theology, nor do they embody any essential element in the life of the Prophet."<sup>72</sup> Although he healed, he attributed the power to Allah,<sup>73</sup> preferring simple remedies.

Ellen White made no claims to work miracles, and Adventists were sometimes taunted that if

she were a real prophet she should be able to demonstrate miraculous powers.<sup>74</sup> Adventists did claim that there were remarkable instances of healing in response to her prayers,<sup>75</sup> but her own writing downplays her own role, and emphasizes the prayer of faith which all may exercise. She records healing brought about by God through the prayers of others.

Has the role of Mohammed changed between the living and the dead prophet? Even before his death there were some who sought to deify Mohammed. This he strongly resisted, not even allowing a monument on his grave. There is one God. "Muslims will allow attacks on Allah; there are atheists and atheistic publications and rationalist societies; but to disparage Mohammed will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community, a fanaticism of blazing vehemence."<sup>76</sup>

There are at least 200 names of the prophet. Most of these are post-Koranic. Some of these lift him far above the ordinary mortal: "The

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City of Knowledge, The Key of Paradise, The Holy Spirit, The Pure, The Good, Liege Lord of the Two Worlds.”<sup>77</sup>

“Doctrine follows devotion.” In the case of Mary and the saints, the theologians have usually given doctrinal shape to the beliefs and practices of devotees, rather than the theologians developing devotional practices. No Adventists, not even the perfectionist wing, have ever attributed sinlessness to Ellen White. Since she died in 1915, she did not live through the final conflict without an intercessor. On the other hand, the Adventist Church has been slow to acknowledge the foibles and weaknesses of Ellen White, this despite her own statement that biographies of the immaculate bring discouragement to the reader. Christians do not expect sinlessness; they do expect holiness in the life of God’s servants.

Muslim creeds have tended to attribute sinlessness to the prophets, and among the Shi’ites, to the immams. The incomparability of the Koran is paralleled by the sinlessness or immunity to sin of the prophet (Ismah), which is an evidence of prophethood. Yet the Koran clearly teaches that Mohammed sinned, and could be saved only by grace, not even his own good deeds.<sup>78</sup> Some Muslims argue that the sins refer to the time before the call.

There has been a tendency among Adventists to “mythologize” Ellen White since her death. The 1919 Bible conference was an attempt to look at issues honestly and frankly, but the issues were too explosive to go public.

Although Ellen White refused to be manipulated in her lifetime, some have felt that her writings have been used to provide information and guidance for any topic the church leadership found necessary. Issues include the degree of originality of the ideas on health and education in the Ellen White writings. Her work has been represented as far in advance of anyone in her own time. The miracle is not in the originality, but in the selectivity, in the

strong emphasis on the spiritual basis of health and education, and implanting these ideas into the very marrow of the Adventist Church. Adventists may find it hard to accept a prophet with human foibles, even though she herself was well aware of them, and realized that she could be lost.<sup>79</sup>

Concerning the life of Mohammed, there are three levels of information and, by inference, reliability: the Koran, the *Hadith*, and the tradition. The last are *Sunnah*, stories less carefully researched than the Hadith. Azami believed the *Sunnah* is essential to full understanding of some verses in the Koran.<sup>80</sup> There is likewise a cluster of tradition and legend concerning the work of Ellen White. Some will refuse to give up the legend, even when it is proved false. In fact, the challenge seems to make them cling more tightly to their belief. Of such are the most incorrigible fundamentalists made!<sup>81</sup>

Charges against Ellen White include fraud, greed, ambition, plagiarism, and selective editing to cover up changed beliefs.<sup>82</sup> Mohammed was accused of learning the Koran from others,<sup>83</sup> being merely a poet or soothsayer,<sup>84</sup> and forgery.<sup>85</sup>

## Influence of the Prophets

Adventists have from their early days emphasized that the Bible and the Bible only is our creed. We have hesitated, counseled by Ellen White, to present the Spirit of Prophecy as an argument for Adventists beliefs. So, as Seventh-day Adventists, we sometimes appear to hover between assurance that we are right because the prophetic gift has been manifested amongst us, and embarrassment, because of the Protestant rule of *sola scriptura*.

But can we turn the blessing of the prophetic gift into a more positive way of working? Can we use the fact and ministry of Ellen White in a more direct way for Muslims? While

we would not be right in placing Ellen White in the same relation to Adventists as Joseph Smith stands to the Latter Day Saints, or Mary Baker Eddy to Christian Science, yet she had a role. How could we emphasize that without getting things out of proportion to the Scriptural tradition, and possibly obscuring the central figure of God in Christ?

Ellen White could be introduced to Muslims

as the end-time illuminator of Scripture, bringing into sharper focus the cosmic drama of good and evil depicted in the Koran. Muslims might respond to the Ellen White who called people back to clean living away from pig meat and alcohol as part of holistic holiness. Just as Mohammed did, Ellen White called a community into existence to lead a complete way of life.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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