Eastern clinging to their priesthoods. The basic message brought by all prophet-messengers is one and the same: "Believe in God and do good." It cannot be simpler or clearer. For our own good, we must reclaim this pure divine gold and remove such theological debris that for centuries has hidden it for us.

In spite of the above criticism and the fact that the writer has not told us much about the older Eastern religions of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, the 511-page book packed with information and containing a refreshing analysis is certainly a very welcome addition to literature on religion.

Kassim Ahmad


Michael Cook's biography of the Prophet of Islam entitled *Muhammad* is an extremely interesting and perplexing work. Part of the reason for this is the fact that the book is written by a non-believer who not only doubts the authenticity of Muhammad's message but that of all monotheistic religions. According to him all advanced civilizations of ancient times believed in polytheism, and the concept of monotheism arose amongst "... conceptually less sophisticated people of the Near East, the Israelites" (p. 6). He goes on to assert that had the concept of monotheism remained the exclusive preserve of the Israelites "... it would not have ranked as more than a curiosity in the history of the world at large" (p. 6). But "... a minor Jewish heresy... Christianity" emerged, eventually became a world religion, and spread the concept of monotheism in a vast region of the world. There is an almost nostalgic tone in Cook's narrative describing the demise of polytheism in the face of expanding Christianity.

It was Muḥammad's ability to appropriate the concept of monotheism and alter it slightly to suit the local environment in Arabia, which is largely responsible for the emergence of the Arabs on the stage of history. According to Cook, Muḥammad's genius is rooted in his ability to articulate a monotheistic message, contrast it with the polytheistic surroundings, propagate the message, and have the political acumen to outwit his opponents. Hence he was able to firmly implant the concept of monotheism amongst the Arabs who are presumably even less "... conceptually... sophisticated people" than the ones amongst whom the concept originally emerged, the Israelites.

Cook's approach to discussing the career of Muḥammad is quite original. He approaches the subject from the viewpoint of the monotheistic tradition at large. This is best illustrated by the titles of chapters 3–6: "The
Monotheist Universe", "Monotheist History", "Monotheist Law", and "Monotheist Politics". Viewing the Prophet's career from this angle certainly does give one new insights into the significance of his message and life.

Consequently the details of Muhammad's life do not receive extensive attention in Cook's book. The chapter dealing with his biographical particulars is only thirteen pages long. The bulk of the book deals with the nature of Muhammad's monotheistic message, the manner in which he articulated it, and the methods he used to outmanoeuvre his opponents and eventually triumph. Along with his descriptive narrative of historical events, Cook liberally offers his personal insights into what could have been, what should have been, and what is, the hidden meaning behind a certain event or declaration of the Prophet. Many of these asides, which are the prominent feature of the book, are very colourful, some of them even comical.

For the most part Cook refers to information and facts which have been widely accepted by the adherents of Islam, but at certain crucial junctures he resorts to citing obscurities and absurdities to illustrate a point. The opening paragraphs of chapter four, "Monotheist History", are a case of such absurdities. The way Cook's narrative progresses one gets the unmistakeable impression that most Muslims believe that the world is about 6000 years old, with some disagreement among some scholars. Even though it is an undeniable fact that certain Muslims in the past did estimate that the world was 6000 years old, these calculations have no basis in the Qur'anic narrative or the Prophetic tradition, and they certainly are not in any way a part of the Islamic orthodoxy. Why does Cook make an issue out of something which is not even remotely connected with the teachings of Muhammad and the belief system he advocated? His motives for having taken the trouble to go through such a discussion are quite dubious. There are a few other such dubious instances in the course of the book.

After finishing chapter seven entitled "The Sources", dealing with the sources of Islamic beliefs and law, one wonders if any of these sources are authentic and trustworthy. Beginning with the Qur'ān, the primary source, Cook notes that the book "... is strikingly lacking in structure" (p. 68). He goes on to note that in the Qur'ān

God may appear in the first and third persons in one and the same sentence, there may be omissions which, if not made good by interpretation, render the sense unintelligible; there are even what look like grammatical errors. (p. 68)

These are very serious issues which Cook raises. The reader is left on his own to discover the cases of such "... extraordinarily conservative editing", to use Cook's own words, because he does not provide any examples to illustrate his point. It is the height of intellectual cowardice to raise such controversial issues and offer no evidence to support one's position. Such an approach in academia
is akin to a little child hurling insults at a perceived adversary. The second
source for Islamic law and beliefs, the Tradition, is an even more flawed source
than the Qur'ān, according to Cook. He notes that there are many conflicting
reports related to a single event in the Prophet's life. Additionally, in the vast
body of traditional narratives, it is often impossible to distinguish between "... 
genuine historical information and material that came into existence to explain
the very Koranic passages that concern us" (p. 71). Here Cook goes into a
lengthy discussion on the meaning, or the lack thereof, of īlaţ and rihlāh to
illustrate his point. I must admit I did not clearly see the relevance of this
discussion to the issue at hand.

Cook states bluntly that the only reliable sources regarding the career
of the Prophet are those which stand outside the Islamic tradition, which he
labels "external evidence". He admits that some of this material can be traced
back as early as CE 633-4, meaning after the Prophet's death, and most of it is
from an even later time period. Cook is especially keen to focus on a few works
in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian which refer to Muhammad's life, the authors
of which are unknown to Cook or anyone else. But it can be said with certainty
that none of these chroniclers could have known Muhammad personally or even
been to the Arabian peninsula. It must be kept in mind that all non-Muslims
were expelled from the peninsula long before most of these accounts were
written. Some of the information contained in these sources contradicts some of
the accepted data related to Muhammad's life. The fact that Cook prefers this
"external evidence" and rejects the accepted sources speaks volumes about Cook
as an academician. The data contained in these sources is far more suspect than
the accepted sources.

Besides Cook's proclivity for accepting dubious sources upon which to
base his research and opinion, there is even more direct evidence that he is
hopelessly confused. He concludes his book with the following words:

Both Judaism and Christianity are religions of profound pathos —
Judaism with its dream of ethnic redemption from present
wretchedness, Christianity with its individual salvation through the
sufferings of a God of love. In each case the pathos is indeed moving,
but it is a pathos which too readily appeals to the emotion of self-pity.
Islam, in contrast, is strikingly free of this temptation. The bleakness
which we saw in its conception of the relationship between God and
man is authentic, unadulterated bleakness of the universe itself. (pp.
88-9)

In essence Cook is saying that the Islamic view of universe remains faithful to
authentic reality, or to put it more bluntly the Islamic message is the "Truth".
He reaches this conclusion after spending eighty-eight pages doubting everything
from the sources on which Islam is based, to the stability of Muhammad's
psyche, and even the validity of a monotheistic worldview. In the face of such
stupendous contradictions one has to doubt not only the methods used by the author to reach his conclusions, but the conclusion themselves. Because if his conclusion about Islam is correct there has to be a more sound method to arrive at it. Similarly his assertion the Judaism and Christianity represent "profound pathos" should also be categorically rejected, because the method used to reach the conclusion is no different than the one used in the case of Islam.

Basit B. Koshul


The Saudi poet Hisham Ali Hafiz hails from Madinah, the dreamland of Muslims all over the world. Genealogically he is descended from the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's choicest benedictions be on him). The seventy-three poems — not eighty-five as shown on the jacket — are his solidified dreams translated into English (the name of the translator has not been mentioned).

As Peter Mansfield has clarified in his foreword and as is also manifest from the caption of the last poem, "I am a poet who uses no rhymes", as well as the title in Arabic chosen for the book, *Kalimāt lahā Īqā* (Words with Rhythm) (p. ix) — the poems fall under the currently fashionable prose-poetry. In the absence of the original, one can only wonder how they might have sounded and tasted in Arabic.

Hisham combines in himself a rare admixture of qualifications. He received his B.Sc. in Military Science from Cairo Military College in 1954 and his B.A in Political Science and Economics from Cairo University in 1955. Additionally, he is the publisher of the largest group of newspapers and magazines in the Arab world.

The contents of the book are divided under eleven well-defined parts, viz:

1. Supplications and Entreaties (seven poems).
2. Remember God and He Will Remember You (eight poems).
4. Bleeding Palestine (five poems).