

“Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) the Perfect Exemplar”

The author was invited by the Pacific Theological College, based in Fiji to speak to 3rd-year Catholic student-priests about Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but within a given window of just 45 minutes. Another 15 minutes was set aside for questions.

This extraordinary event became one of several significant milestones in the operations of our society in Fiji, of becoming a respected reference point to other religious groups. The liberal stance taken by our society to accommodate other faiths’ questioning does not go unrecognised.

In addition, our mosque, which is located in Suva, has also become a recognised and respected institution of religious worship, as students of other Christian groups have visited the mosque several times, over several years, to observe *Jummah* (Friday) prayers, and then staying back a while asking pertinent questions. A common comment coming from all visitors to our mosque has been their observations that our society in Fiji is a unique Muslim organisation, which visibly demonstrated equal rights to women, where women are given equal rights to attend to mosque functions, pray in the same mosque chamber as men did and without the imposition of material partitions, segregating between women and men; and further, without the imposition of *burkha* and the *niqab* wearing on women and girls. Men stand in the front behind the Imam and women are spaced away behind the men, but in the same mosque chamber. This feature has become a hallmark of our society.

This trend of admiration and due respect shall continue, gaining significant mileage in the propagation of Islam and in the widest perspective. It is now necessary to introduce the subject of “Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) the Perfect Exemplar” as delivered to the Catholic student-priests.

The following event records the historical flow-on of the first series of Divine revelations, delivered to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), whilst he was worshiping deeply in prayer in a cave.

"Read !" said the Angel, delivering God's message.

Muhammad replied most truthfully, “I cannot read.”

"Read !" repeated the Angel with increased Divine authority.

Muhammad again repeated very honestly, "I cannot read."

Then the Angel embraced Muhammad most powerfully and commanded:

"Read and Recite After Me the Following Words:

Read in the name of thy Lord Who creates —

Creates man from a clot,

Read and thy Lord is most Generous,

Who taught by the pen,

Taught man what he knew not.”

(Revelation paused)

“Nay, man is surely inordinate,
Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient.
Surely to thy Lord is the return.
Hast thou seen him who forbids
A servant when he prays?
Seest thou if he is on the right way,
Or enjoins observance of duty?
Seest thou if he denies and turns away?
Knows he not that Allah sees?
Nay, if he desist not, We will seize him by the forelock —
A lying, sinful forelock!
Then let him summon his council,
We will summon the braves of the army.
Nay! Obey him not, but prostrate thyself, and draw nigh (to Allah).”

(Holy Qur'an: Ch 96 vv 1 - 19).

The above first set of 1-5 verses were the words of God, the first revelation delivered as a single message by Archangel Gabriel in the form of a well-made man, to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), using the Prophet as an inspirational human medium, to introduce Islam as a religion and later, the Holy Qur'an as its Scripture. The balance of verses 6-19 were delivered at later revelations.

It should be noted that inasmuch as the preface to a book is its introductory, outlining its subject, scope and general structure, the above 19 verses deem the role of preface of relationship of God to mankind, the Greatness of God and the vulnerability of mankind and the stressed need for mankind to be educated and so enabling reading of the Holy Qur'an for salvation of mankind.

Who was Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)?

Nearly 1,440 years ago, on 20th April AD 571, a child was born in Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula. This child was named Ahmad. The child's mother's name was Aminah, who was married to Abdullah, a wealthy businessman of the Banu Hashim family. A few days after Abdullah had married Aminah, he went away on a trading journey to Syria. Syria in those days was the international business centre in the Middle East. Traders had to travel from other countries, using camel-trains and the journey took several months in each direction. Abdullah loaded his camel-trains with supplies from Arabia and proceeded to Syria to sell them off. He used the proceeds from sales to buy other merchandise.

On his return journey home from Syria, Aminah's husband (Abdullah) fell ill and died. His employees buried Abdullah at location where he died, and they brought over the camel-train of

merchandise to his young widow, Aminah who was pregnant with her first child. Later, Ahmad was born without ever seeing his father. So saddening!

Before birth of her only child, Aminah dreamt she will have a son and her son was to be named Ahmad; and that a very powerful light was spreading out from her womb, out wide, to every country in the world. She knew confidently, her son would be really great, later in his life.

The young widow Aminah progressively sold off all the merchandise and camels and gradually she used up all the proceeds from that final trade transaction. She had no other means of income. Her financial status began to deteriorate and she slipped lower in her status from wife of a wealthy businessman to a common widow with child. Again, so saddening!

It was customary amongst Arabians that a child be brought up by a wet nurse. But all wet nurses denied Ahmad's acceptance because his father had died and there was no assumed guarantee of the wet nurse's regular payments. He was finally accepted and brought up by a poor woman named Halima. When Ahmad was four years old Halima returned him to his mother, Aminah, whose economic status had deteriorated. Two years later when Ahmad was barely six, his mother also died.

What a dismal start for a child! The neighbours then felt pity and took the orphaned and infant Ahmad to his grandfather Abu Mutalib in Mecca, who then changed and renamed the child as "Muhammad" from his mother's originally given birth-name of Ahmad. His grandfather then took charge of him.

Two years later the grandfather also died. The child was now worse-off. So sad!

At the age of eight years, Muhammad was then sent to live with his uncle Abu Talib. It was also a very poor home. It was poverty that shaped and formed children into certain aggressiveness; and fights among children were common occurrences to get the best. The same concept also applies amongst poverty-stricken communities even today. Muhammad was different right from the beginning and noticeably so. Muhammad never went to school inasmuch as his other neighbours and friends from wealthier families within the tribe. Poverty ruled the fate of children from childhood through to adulthood.

At the age of twelve years, Muhammad became the favourite of his Uncle Abu Talib who took him on a trading journey to Syria. On the way they met a Christian missionary named Baheera, who saw Muhammad's glowing face and told Abu Talib to take great care of Muhammad as the boy's face had very special signs of future greatness.

Muhammad lived to be a person of medium stature. He had brilliant eyes. He always had a friendly sweet smile. He had a very powerful memory, lively imagination and quick understanding. His speech was soft, yet firm. He never wore any fine clothes in his life and led a life of practical simplicity. Muhammad did not discard clothes because they got torn. He washed and mended his clothes and never became a burden upon other people to do things for him.

Since his childhood, Muhammad disliked worship of idols. He considered them as lifeless creations of man, rather than living creations of God. When Muhammad was a child the worship of idols was the normal way of life for most Arabians. Muhammad hated making and consumption of any intoxicating beverages or anything which altered the mind.

He also hated all forms of vice and kept away from people with bad habits. At an early age, still in his teens he acquired the title of *Al Amin*, which in Arabic means the "Honest One." At the age of 25 he married a widow of aged 40 who was a businesswoman of Mecca. After his marriage he was very successful in increasing her business most extraordinarily and he was singularly instrumental to free her slaves and thereafter, all slaves in Mecca.

Muhammad started his prayer meditation in a cave called *Hira* and spent most of his free moments in prayer. He often took food with him and spent several days in the cave in deep prayer. It was on one such day in the month of *Ramadan* that Archangel Gabriel appeared to him in the cave and delivered the revelation already given detailed. This was his initiation into prophethood and henceforth he is referred to with exclusive respect as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The expanded version of pbuh means "Peace Be Upon Him."

The visitation inside the cave by Archangel Gabriel (as mentioned earlier in this article) had really frightened Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and he sweated profusely.

From then onwards Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) knew and announced publicly that he was a prophet appointed by God to act as His Agent and also as the Ambassador of The Most High. He also recognised that his life was that of a mission only: and he had a specific purpose to fulfil on earth that was: To spread God's word to every part of the world and to every person, to recognise God, to love God, honour and serve Him only. This is stated so in the Holy Qur'an at 48:29, as "*Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the disbelievers, compassionate among themselves. Thou seest them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking Allah's grace and pleasure. Their marks are on their faces in consequence of prostration. That is their description in the Torah — and their description in the Gospel — like seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the disbelievers on account of them. Allah has promised such of them as believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward.*"

The idol-worshipping community in Arabia, which until then praised Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) for honesty, now turned against him, because Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) introduced a "new kind of spiritual God" which could not be seen or touched, such as statues and idols, etc. Accordingly, this new kind of God was no longer conveniently portable - could not be moved about places at peoples' desires.

His first four associates and converts were his wife Khadeeja, uncle Abu Talib, cousin Ali and Hazrat Abu Bakar - a very close friend and ally. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had many converts but most faced persecution and then gradually the numbers grew so fast and widespread so exponentially, that persecution of worst possible imagination was no longer effective deterrent to restrain converts.

The people of Medina then chose the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the Head of State but Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) never lived the opulence of a king or a head of state. He never had a palace, never wore kingly robes, never wore a king's crown and never had a throne. Instead, simplicity was his code of ethics, amongst love and care for poor, needy and the oppressed.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) most courageously elevated the status of woman equal to man so that she had the recognition of existence, had right to own property and to dispose of property, as she desired. She had the right to believe in one God and pray! The woman also had the

functional rights to fast and give to charity; she was allowed to go to Mecca and perform pilgrimage. She was no longer mere chattel! Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the most successful prophet and human being ever known!

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) propagated the oneness in humanity, the dignity of manhood, prayer to God, service of humanity, charity, character-building, distribution of wealth, work and labour, the home life, equality between sexes and all affairs of the State.

In all, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) prescribed the perfect recipes of life for man and woman, things never before heard in the world of that time and which are still valid to this modern time. He is the world's most successful man ever and the finality of prophethood.

The revealed scriptures mention names of prophets and who in their mission were special Ambassadors from God, ordained as such with direct appearances of Archangel Gabriel delivering the Divine messages. An important point to note is that scriptures mention names of those prophets only as exemplary and linking them to certain events as lessons for human beings. The scriptures are not however, registers of births, deaths and marriages of prophets. Altogether there were over 124,000 prophets who came to every nation in this world since creation. Some of the Israelite prophets who descended from lineage of Adam include: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Eber, Saleh, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Shu'ayb, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, John the Baptist and Jesus. (The Arabic names and pronunciations differ slightly from what is in the Bible). Each of these prophets came for a particular community of their era and matched the level of civilisation and whatever technology which existed then.

However, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) descended from the lineage of Ishmael and he was the only prophet in that line. His arrival sealed off any further arrival of any other prophet in any other religion. This is evidence in the Holy Qur'an at 33:40, as "*Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the prophets. And Allah is ever Knower of all things.*"

So why then is Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) not so readily and widely accepted in and amongst the various Christian communities? The answer lies in what is widely accepted as the cornerstone of Christianity and which contradicts with what Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) preached, contradicts with various verses of the Holy Qur'an and contradicts with Islam in its principles.

One of the cornerstones of Christianity is that Jesus died on the cross upon his crucifixion but the Holy Qur'an contradicts at 4:157, as "*And for their saying: We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah, and they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for certain.*"

Another cornerstone is the widespread acceptance amongst Christians that Jesus is one of three in the Trinity and that Jesus was materially the son of God. Again the Holy Qur'an contradicts at 4:171, as "*O People of the Book, exceed not the limits in your religion nor speak anything about Allah, but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only a messenger of Allah and His word which He communicated to Mary and a mercy from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you. Allah*

is only one God. Far be it from His glory to have a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And sufficient is Allah as having charge of affairs.”

The re-affirming counterbalance appears also at 5:116, as “*And when Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah? He will say: Glory be to Thee! it was not for me to say what I had no right to (say). If I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy mind. Surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen.*”

Islam is one of the three Semitic religions and there are substantial substances of commonalities amongst them; and the other two being Judaism and Christianity. In this regard, the Holy Qur’an clarifies with necessary ramification at 2: 136, as “*Say: We believe in Allah and (in) that which has been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit.*”

The main differences which set aside Christianity from Islam is that much of the rituals and practices in Christianity are really infusion of Roman beliefs and practices into Christianity.

History shows, throughout the world, that whenever there were mass conversions of certain communities into another community as receiving host, and then much of their previous beliefs, rituals and practices got carried over into the next new host community.

Thank you.