

Joseph Smith, an American Muhammad? An Essay on the Perils of Historical Analogy

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Analogy is a fashionable device which many authors employ to embellish otherwise bland expositions, and few writers can resist the urge to compare certain individuals with what they regard as legitimate historic parallels. The role of the first president of the United States has become so proverbial that the initial leader of many a modern republic has been labeled the "George Washington" of his country. An even more intriguing example of this practice is the attempt to picture Joseph Smith as an American Muhammad. Although Joseph Smith had been associated with many historical and literary figures, including so unlikely a character as Don Juan,¹ he has been most seriously depicted as a backwoods American version of the seventh-century prophet from Mecca. H. A. R. Gibb, an eminent authority on Islam, recently observed that Muhammad has traditionally been "portrayed as an epileptic, as a socialist agitator, [or] as a proto-Mormon."² What follows is a brief review of the development of this analogy, an exposition of its major points, and an attempt to determine its validity.

GROWTH OF THE ANALOGY

The major source of the comparison is almost certainly to be found in the works of pious writers who felt the need to expose Joseph Smith and Mormonism, the exposés usually contending that both Joseph Smith and Muhammad differed little from preceding "impostors" and "deluders."³ A review of prominent heretics would then usually follow the explanation that the Yankee Seer was simply the most recent in a long procession. From the beginning, these lists of infamous frauds often included the name of Muhammad. Joseph Smith's "extreme ignorance and apparent stupidity"

¹A chapter of Wilhelm Wyl's *Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Pub. Co., 1886) is entitled "The Don Juan of Nauvoo." Hereafter cited as Wyl.

²*Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, second ed., 1962), p. 23.

³Alexander Campbell, "Delusions," *Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, Va.), 2 (1831), 85. Cf. also Campbell's *Delusions, an Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), p. 5.

were identified by E. D. Howe in 1834 as well-worn cloaks in the "wardrobe of impostors. They were thrown upon the shoulders of the great prince of deceivers, Mohammed, in order to carry in his train the host of ignorant and superstitious of his time."⁴ Curiously, a minor source of the comparison may be an utterance attributed to Joseph Smith himself. In 1838, dissident Mormon apostle Thomas B. Marsh formally testified to having heard the Prophet boast that

he would yet tread down his enemies, and walk over their dead bodies; and if he was not let alone, he would be a second Mohammed to this generation, and that it would be one gore of blood from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean; that like Mohammed, whose motto in treating for peace was, 'the Alcoran or the Sword,' so should it be eventually with us, 'Joseph Smith or the Sword.'⁵

Although this threat was quite probably a mere fabrication by the disgruntled Marsh,⁶ biographers often considered it authentic. Henry Caswall in 1842, James H. Hunt in 1844, and W. S. Simpson in 1853 all quoted Joseph Smith as comparing himself to Muhammad.⁷

Soon the latter-day vilifiers tired of their more narrow Muhammad-Joseph Smith comparison and broadened their attack to include a comparison of Mormonism with Islam. C. Snouck Hurgronje has called his tactic "crytomohammedanism." "The Roman Catholics," he explained, "often vilified Protestantism by comparing the Reformed doctrine to that of Mohammedanism."⁸ Writing at the request of the Anglican Church's Young Men's Society, W. S. Simpson concluded that Mormonism "bears in many respects a striking resemblance to Mahometanism, especially as to its sensual character, its founder, and its pretended revelations."⁹ Although intended on at least one occasion as a tribute,¹⁰ the analogy was soon escalated by sub-

⁴*History of Mormonism* (Painesville, New York: pub. by author, c. 1834), p. 12. In 1831, Alexander Campbell ("Delusions," p. 85) likened Joseph Smith to Sabati Levi, a "false messiah" of the seventeenth century who eventually accepted Islam. Campbell wrote, "We have been thus particular in giving a few of the incidents of the life of this imposter . . . because of some remarkable analogies between him and the present New York imposter." Howe, however, seems to have been the first to compare Joseph Smith directly with Muhammad.

⁵Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1948), III, p. 167n; hereafter cited as DHC.

⁶Orson Hyde, who seconded Marsh's allegations in 1838, had a change of heart the following year and confessed that unspecified portions of the affidavit had been invented by Marsh. (DHC, III, pp. 167-68n; see also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1950), pp. 225-27.

⁷Rev. Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons: Or, Three Days at Nauvoo in 1842* (London: Rivington, 1842), p. 77; hereafter cited as Caswall; James H. Hunt, *Mormonism: Embracing the Origin, Rise and Progress of the Sect* (St. Louis: Ustick and Davies, 1844), p. v; William Sparrow Simpson, *Mormonism: Its History, Doctrines and Practices* (London: A. M. Pigott, 1853), p. 33; hereafter cited as Simpson.

⁸*Mohammedanism: Lectures on Its Origin, Its Religious and Political Growth, and Its Present State* (New York: Putnam's, 1916), p. 18.

⁹Simpson, p. 57.

¹⁰James G. Bennett, editor of the *New York Herald*, wrote on Nov. 7, 1842, that the Mormon Prophet "indicates as much talent, originality, and moral courage as Mahomet, Odin, or any of the great spirits that have hitherto produced the revolutions of the past ages." In this case, Joseph himself seems not to have resented the reference, for soon after he proposed to the Nauvoo City Council "that we recommend our fellow citizens to subscribe for the *New York Weekly Herald*" (DHC, IV, pp. 477-78).

sequent writers so that by 1851 it had received top billing in two anonymous publications: "The Yankee Mahomet" and *The Mormons: The "American Mahomet"*.¹¹ In the same tradition, there appeared after the turn of the century Jennie Fowler Willing's *On American Soil; or Mormonism: The Mohammedanism of the West* and Bruce Kinney's *Mormonism: the Islam of America*.¹²

The more encompassing comparisons between Mormonism and Islam continued to emphasize the similarity between Muhammad and Joseph Smith: virtually every commentator acknowledged the perfect match, some commentators spoke of a "backwoods" Muhammad and others of a "bourgeois" Muhammad. "The student of Mormonism," wrote ex-Mormon T. B. H. Stenhouse in 1873, "will be struck with the similarity of experience and claims of Joseph Smith and Mohammed."¹³ Among the first to be so impressed were such flamboyant globetrotters as Jules Remy, Sir Richard F. Burton, and Wilhelm Wyl, all of whose travelogues became standard sources for subsequent works on Mormonism. Except for Sir Richard Burton, none of these nineteenth-century writers possessed sufficient knowledge of Islam to draw more than a superficial parallel.

After 1900 the comparison attracted the attention of writers who were not only more familiar with Muhammad but who approached the issue with a much more soundly prepared background and thus advanced some hypotheses which deserve careful analysis.

In 1906 D. S. Margoliouth, a pioneering orientalist, was intrigued with the analogy. His important biography, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, contains frequent references to Joseph Smith.¹⁴ Six years later, Eduard Meyer, one of the most respected scholars of his day, published his *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*.¹⁵ Though primarily an authority on ancient religions, Meyer was equally fascinated by modern religions. "Of the many new religious movements originating in our time," he wrote, "Mormonism very early awakened my interest, especially because of its surprising and close resemblance to the historical development of Islam" (*OHM*, i). In 1932 George Arbaugh, despite an introductory acknowledgment that "similarities between Islam and Mormonism have been misunderstood and exaggerated," equated the two religions in his *Revelation in Mormonism*.¹⁶ Soon after, the comparison received its most exclusive attention in an article by Hans

¹¹The first appeared in the *American Whig Review*, n.s. 13 (June 1851), 554-64. The second was published by the Office of the National Illustrated Library (London, 1851). The author of this volume has been identified as Charles Mackay by Leonard J. Arrington in "Charles Mackay and his 'True and Impartial History' of the Mormons," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 36 (Winter, 1968), 24-40. In a later work Mackay suggested "God is great, and Joe Smith is his prophet" as a formula for Mormon worship in *Life and Liberty in America* (London; Smith, Elder, 1859), I, 223.

¹²Louisville: Pickett Pub. Co., 1906 (hereafter cited as Willing); New York, Revell, 1912.

¹³*The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: Appleton, 1873), pp. 2-3.

¹⁴London: Putnam's, 1906; third ed., 1923; hereafter cited as Margoliouth.

¹⁵Halle: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1912; English edition, *The Origin and History of the Mormons, with Reflections on the Beginnings of Islam and Christianity*, translated by Heinz F. Rahde and Eugene Seach (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah, 1961); hereafter cited as *OHM*.

¹⁶*Revelation in Mormonism: Its Character and Changing Forms* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1932; reprinted 1950), p. vii; hereafter cited as *RM*.

Thimme, a Protestant clergyman and Islamicist.¹⁷ Finally, Georges Henri Bousquet added a better-than-average understanding of Mormonism to his intimate acquaintance with Islam in order to compare the two faiths in several publications.¹⁸

Certainly, not all of the above examples reveal a similarity in purpose and design in either the Joseph Smith-Muhammad or Mormonism-Islam comparison and therefore do not all qualify as legitimate analogies. Many early authors such as E. D. Howe and Alexander Campbell were more interested in using the comparison to call Joseph Smith an impostor and Mormonism a deception. Nevertheless, such serious students as Burton and Arbaugh, and particularly, Margoliouth, Meyer, Thimme, and Bousquet have dealt with specific examples of similarity. It is primarily in the works of these writers that the analogy receives its most complete development.

Since no one author has touched on all aspects of the analogy, we will present a composite comparison of similarities of personal experience, historical development, and religious dogma between the two religious leaders and religions. The significant points of comparison can be listed as follows:

Prophetic Powers. Hippolyte Taine noted the anxiety which in each case preceded the initial revelation,¹⁹ and Margoliouth likened the effect of Muhammad's conversations with Jews and Christians to Joseph Smith receiving "an early impulse from his observations of the differences between rival sects."²⁰ Commenting on Muhammad's vision of Gabriel, Eduard Meyer observed that the manifestation was "similar to the first vision of Joseph Smith, when God the Father and his son appeared" (*OHM*, 48). Hans Thimme saw a parallel between Gabriel's visit to Muhammad and Joseph's vision of the angel Moroni. With regard to the sincerity of the revelation, Thimme concluded that "Mohammed and Joseph Smith both felt themselves to be real prophets" ("MI," 158, 159). John Hyde, however, felt that Joseph "imitated Mohammed in his pretended mission and revelations"²¹ and suggested that each seer willfully concocted his tales of vision. Pierre Vinçard advanced a bolder and more questionable thesis when he asserted that the revelations of both were caused by epileptic fits.²² Meyer observed that the "illiterate" Mormon seer exercised the same domination over his assistants, including the much better educated Rigdon, which Mohammed exercised over Abu Bekr and Omar (*OHM*, vii), and Margoliouth speculated that Joseph Smith convinced the witnesses that they had seen the

¹⁷"Mormonism and Islam," *The Moslem World*, 24 (April, 1934), 155-67; hereafter cited as "MI."

¹⁸In 1934-35, Bousquet devoted three articles to Mormonism: "Le Mormonisme contemporain," *Ouvre-mer*, 7 (1935), 150-71; "Une theocratic economique," *Revue d'économie Politique*, 50 (1936), 166-45; and "L'église mormonne et ses livres sacrés," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 130 (1936), 219-55. He later consolidated these into *Les Mormons* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1949). More recently, he discussed the analogy in "Observations sociologiques sur les origines de l'Islam," *Studia Islamica*, 2 (1945), 61-88.

¹⁹"Taine's Essay on the Mormons," translated by Austin E. Fife, *Pacific Historical Review*, 31 (Feb. 1962), 51-52.

²⁰Margoliouth, p. 76.

²¹*Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York: Pettridge, second ed., 1857), p. 308; hereafter cited as Hyde.

²²Pierre Vinçard in the introduction to M. Etourneau's *Les Mormons* (Paris: Bestel, 1856), p. v.

gold plates in much the same manner as Muhammad convinced his uncle Hamzah that he had seen Gabriel. Margoliouth also claimed that both men made only safe prophecies, Muhammad in predicting a Byzantine victory over Persia and Joseph Smith in forecasting the Civil War.²³

Restored Religion. Richard Burton in *City of the Saints* said that "Mormonism claims at once to be like Christianity[,] a progressive faith, . . . and like El Islam, . . . a restoration by revelation of the pure and primaeval religion of the world" (p. 383). Meyer observed that "both Mohammed and Joseph Smith considered their revelations to be in perfect agreement with the older ones, which they were only continuing and supplementing — all being the 'word of God' " (p. 58). Thimme accepted this observation but qualified it by asserting "that both acknowledged the Old Testament and the New Testament as divine revelation, but that they both, on account of their imperfect knowledge, alter the teachings of the Bible by subject additions and arbitrary changes" (p. 159). Finally, Thimme amplified Meyer's observation by pointing out that

the idea of Joseph Smith is that the Old Testament and the New Testament are given to the Old World. But God did not neglect the people of the western hemisphere. . . . Joseph Smith believes, therefore, that he received the divine teaching for the Indians and the white colonists in the states . . . just as Mohammed understood the Koran as the revelation of the divine will for the Arabs. (p. 163)

Sacred Book. After reviewing the historical development of each seer, Thimme concludes that "we can understand also that the products of their prophetic work, the Koran and the Book of Mormon, are very similar indeed" (p. 162). Meyer observed that "Joseph Smith brought forth a Bible for America" while Muhammed received "a Bible for the Arabs," although he judged that "the creation of Joseph Smith stands far beneath the Koran which is bad enough" (p. 52). An alternate view is offered by an anonymous reviewer for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1851. The writer felt that Smith had produced "a book superior to that of the Arab Prophet; deeper in its philosophy, purer in its morality, and far more original."²⁴ Ruth and Reginald Kauffman compared the Book of Mormon's "epic force" to the Koran's "lyric quality."²⁵ Arbaugh debated which volume of Latter-day Saint scripture ought to be labeled the "Mormon Koran," contending that "the Doctrine and Covenants more than the Book of Mormon approximates the Koran's place of influence" (*RM*, 98n). Bousquet agreed, calling the Doctrine and Covenants "le Qoran du Prophète Joseph Smith."²⁶

Material Religion. "While their [Joseph Smith and Muhammad's] first revelations were more or less thoroughly devoted to matters of religious concern," observed Thimme, "their later products are more and more devoted to matters of this world" ("MI," 162). Meyer also noted "that one may follow in the case of both Prophets a progressive degeneration, a tran-

²³Margoliouth, p. 134.

²⁴3 (October 1951), 701.

²⁵*The Latter-day Saints: A Study in the Light of Economic Conditions* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), p. 332; hereafter cited as Kauffman.

²⁶*L'église mormonne et ses livres sacrés*, p. 232.

sition from a stage of genuine vision to a later stage of purely fictional inspiration (*OHM*, 56). Both seers defended themselves against these charges of prophetic fictionalism, and herein writers found additional points of similarity. Margoliouth compared Muhammad's boast to a skeptic "that no one without divine aid could compose so well" with Joseph Smith's challenge to William E. McClellin who "endeavored to write a commandment like unto one of the least of the Lord's, but failed,"²⁷ and Arbaugh repeated the story, identifying an-Nadr b. al-Harith as "the McClellin of Islam" (*RM*, 87n). Like Meyer, the Kauffmans charged that "each [seer] received revelations when revelation was convenient to his material comfort,"²⁸ although Richard Burton, reacting somewhat protectively to these attacks on the two prophets' so-called material revelations, observed that though "their exceeding opportuneness excites suspicion . . . of what use are such messages from heaven unless they arrive *à propos*?"²⁹

Sensual Religion. Meyer claimed that "both Joseph Smith and Mohammed used a word of God to settle their private needs and most intimate love affairs," often finding it necessary to "set aside older revelations when circumstances were altered" (*OHM*, 120). This was later echoed by Bousquet.³⁰ In interpreting Joseph Smith's revelation on polygamy, Wilhelm Wyl explained that "the prophet needed a religious mantle to cover his sins and quiet Emma." He then compared the incident with a timely revelation permitting Muhammad to marry the wife of his adopted son.³¹ "In the case of both Mohammed and Joseph Smith," said Meyer, "the sensuality of their lives grew continually stronger, and . . . the means for satisfying it actually appeared as divine commands" (*OHM*, 37). Indeed, Charles Mackay remarked that "Joseph appears . . . to have had as great a *penchant* for a plurality of wives as Mahomet himself,"³² and Ray B. West wrote that "Joseph saw heaven as a place of genuine reward. Like the prophet of Islam, Mohammed, . . . he saw paradise very much as the Moslem conceived it."³³ Finally, Jennie F. Willing observed that "both systems are polygamous; and promise their votaries a sensual, material heaven."³⁴

De-emphasis of Christ. Arbaugh thought that "the hopes of the 'one mighty and strong' [Cf. D&C 85:7] shows how Mormonism can approximate Islam's doctrine of the hidden Imam," thus failing to emphasize Christ (*RM*, 157). Caswell concluded that, "like Mahometanism, Mormonism possesses many features in common with the religion of Christ. . . . But it has cast away that Church which Christ erected . . . and has substituted a false church in its stead."³⁵ Mrs. Willing charged that "both give our Lord Jesus Christ a place in the divine galaxy, though in each system the special

²⁷Margoliouth, p. 134.

²⁸Kauffman, p. 331.

²⁹*The City of the Saints, and Across the Rocky Mountains to California* (New York: Harper, 1862), p. 405.

³⁰"Observations sociologiques sur les origines de l'Islam," p. 78.

³¹Wyl, p. 83.

³²*The Mormons*, (London, 1851), p. 125.

³³*Kingdom of the Saints* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 113.

³⁴Willing, p. 4.

³⁵Caswell, p. 2.

prophet goes far beyond Him in authority.”³⁶ Finally, Thimme accused both religions of rejecting what he considered Christianity’s most important concept:

that human nature is thoroughly corrupted by sin and that it carries out the will of God, not on account of its power, but on account and in spite of its helplessness through God’s enabling grace Mormonism and Islam both lack this message of the cross. (“MI,” 167)

Social, Political, and Economic Community. Both movements, observed Thimme, “claim for their revelation and their books universality. Both, therefore, teach the contents of their message . . . not only in their own country but throughout the entire world” (“MI,” 163). Meyer wrote that “Mormonism was to be a new religion for the entire world,” and that “other churches were to make way for [it] . . . just as other sects were set aside by Mohammed and Islam” (*OHM*, 64). John Hyde remarked that Joseph Smith, having become “the chief of a second Medina . . . wished to extend the resemblance still further, and aspired to rule the continent,”³⁷ or as Meyer put it “as Arabia was to be the inheritance of the Muslims, so was America to become the inheritance of the Mormons” (*OHM*, 57). This implies a religious community with socio-religious as well as political and economic dictums, an idea first articulated by Bousquet³⁸ and recently amplified by the French Marxist, Maxime Rodinson:

In both cases we are dealing with a theocracy prescribed by the originator of the religion: God, through his Prophet, legislates all areas of life for a community of faithful which is called upon to become a political and economic entity.³⁹

“Mormonism is one of the most boldly innovating developments in the history of religions,” added Arbaugh. “Its aggressive theocratic claims, political aspirations, and use of force, make it akin to Islam.”⁴⁰ Parenthetically, Thimme charged that each faith “uses not only peaceful means of missionary preaching but also holy war” (“MI,” 164).

Prophetic Succession. Meyer, mentioning the rival claims put forth at the time of Joseph’s death, remarked that “the family was actually pushed aside just as was Ali, the heir of Mohammed, through the first caliph” (*OHM*, 134). Bousquet hinted at the similarity between the outcome of the respective succession controversies. In each case, the larger, so-called orthodox group (“Utah Mormons” and “Sunni Muslims”) retained the elective principle, whereas the subsequently-formed splinter group (“Reorganites”

³⁶Willing, p. 4.

³⁷Hyde, p. 308.

³⁸In 1936, Bousquet wrote, “Au point de vue sociologique, nous trouvons un parallélisme frappant dans l’emploi de la révélation comme moyen de mener une communauté religieuse primitive” (“L’église mormonne et ses livres sacrés,” p. 233).

³⁹“The Life of Muhammad and the Sociological Problem of the Beginnings of Islam,” *Diogenes*, 20 (Winter, 1957), 48.

⁴⁰Arbaugh, p. vii.

and "Shi'i Muslims") insisted on hereditary succession in the family of the prophet.⁴¹ Then "after some warfare and struggle," added Thimme,

the Mormons gave up their old political ideas and accommodated their customs and habits to the general rules of the continental state . . . just as also the Mohammedans in the course of their development were forced to separate their political and religious universalism . . . and to give up the old ideal of a united Mohammedan world government. ("MI," 165-66)

Jennie Willing foresaw this loss of secular power as the beginning of total disappearance. "Mohammedanism is doomed," she prophesied. "It is losing its African and European possessions. . . . Mormonism has also had its death-stab . . . [due to] the incoming of loyal American citizens."⁴²

THE ANALOGY CONSIDERED

An analysis of the various points of the analogy reveals two types of flaws: outright errors and gross oversimplifications. In the former category, the allegations that Mormonism is unChristian, that Joseph Smith occupies a more exalted position than Jesus in Mormon theology, that Mormon proselyting employs the idea of holy war,⁴³ and that either Islam or Mormonism is likely soon to disappear are obviously the result of wishful and inaccurate thinking and may be summarily dismissed. Some other points are worthy of comment.

While it is true that the revelations or the Koranic suras which Muhammad received while at Medina are markedly less theological than the earlier Meccan suras, it is not correct that the later revelations of Joseph Smith are "more and more devoted to matters of this world." The later portion of the Doctrine and Covenants, notably sections 76, 88, 93, 101, 107, 110, 120, 121, 131, and 132, contain some of the most important contributions to Mormon theology. Indeed these later writings when contrasted with the earlier revelations appear to be much less devoted to temporal matters. It is equally erroneous to state that Joseph Smith and Muhammad had the same view of Paradise. As Bousquet correctly noted,⁴⁴ Mormonism tends to anticipate eternity as an extension of mortality, where family ties continue; but for Mormons, that anticipation harmonizes with their goal of attaining godhood through eternal progression. A concept such as the Celestial Kingdom as set forth in D&C 76:50-70 although admittedly materialistic in one sense is rather far removed from the sensual Muslim ideal of the righteous reclining upon couches in the shade of trees bent low with ripened fruit while drinking from goblets of silver and crystal (Koran 76:12-22). In all fairness, one must add that this passage is often taken symbolically, although such a reading does not negate the sensual overtones. Further, there is no basis for equating the "Hidden Imam" with the "one mighty and strong." The Shi'i "Imam" or the Sunni "Mahdi" is a messianic figure, prominent

⁴¹"L'église mormonne et ses livres sacrés," p. 238.

⁴²Willing, p. 5.

⁴³In making this accusation, Thimme ("MI," p. 164) possibly had reference to the Danites, but this is not clear.

⁴⁴"Une théocratie économique," p. 109.

throughout Muslim literature, who will at his coming revolutionize the world as well as Islam. On the other hand (except for those in apostate groups), Mormon theologians have rarely concerned themselves with the "one mighty and strong." The few who have, have interpreted the scripture as referring to a future presiding bishop who will "set the Church in order" under the direction of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles.⁴⁶ Finally, while some may argue that Christ is de-emphasized in Mormonism, to argue that the de-emphasis approximates that found in Islam where Christ becomes just another prophet is to betray one's ignorance of both Islam and Mormonism.

Oversimplifications⁴⁸ constitute a second kind of error. It is perhaps justified, for example, to compare the respective visions of Muhammad and Joseph Smith since each prophet claimed to behold a heavenly personage or personages; but with that, the comparison ends. The forty-year old Muhammad thought he saw the angel Gabriel although he was deeply confused and disturbed until his wife, Khadija, convinced him that it was of God. The Mormon seer spoke of several manifestations, each of which according to him brought clear answers to specific questions. It is also significant that Joseph experienced his first vision at age fourteen, seven years before he married Emma Hale who therefore could have had no influence on his early prophetic career as did Khadija on Muhammad.

It is likewise true that each prophet gave his followers a book. Beyond that, however, it is difficult to draw a precise comparison between the one sacred volume of Muhammad and the three canons of scripture compiled or translated by Joseph Smith. While comparisons between the Koran and the Book of Mormon are especially strained, a comparison of the Doctrine and Covenants with the Koran has some validity.

Polygamy would seem to be a key aspect of the analogy, but here in particular the comparison involves an oversimplification. As noted by Bousquet,⁴⁷ Muhammad simply retained (and even curtailed somewhat) a marriage custom familiar to the Arabs, whereas Joseph Smith introduced a new and alien institution into his monogamous culture.

Finally, it would be misleading to suppose that Joseph Smith's political role closely paralleled that of Muhammad. The latter began an empire that eventually supplanted the existing states of the Middle East. Accordingly, some Islamic legists held that Muslims dwelling in areas ruled by infidels

⁴⁶Cf. Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., revised ed., 1954), pp. 528-30. The emphasis which the "Church of the Firstborn" and the "Church of the Firstborn of the Fullness of Times" put on this scripture may also be mentioned. In this sense and in the spirit of analogy, one might refer to Joel Lebaron as the "Mahdi of Mormonism."

⁴⁷In this regard, we would agree with the conclusion reached by Wilfred Cantwell Smith after comparing Islam with Christianity: "On careful inquiry matters that seemed at first glance to correspond turn out in fact to diverge in subtle and unexpected ways: the more thoroughly one investigates two systems the more apparent it becomes that parallels are only approximate." "Some Similarities and Differences between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion," in Kritzeck and Winder, eds., *The World of Islam* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 47.

⁴⁸Cf. Winifred Graham, *The Mormons: A Popular History from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1913), pp. 299-300; and Edward P. Hingston, ed., *Artemus Ward's Lecture on the Mormons* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1882), p. 20.

(*dar al-harb*) must emigrate to the pale of Islam (*dar al-Islam*). Joseph Smith served as major of Nauvoo and aspired to the Presidency of the United States, but in practice if not in theory he cautiously remained within American political traditions. The Doctrine and Covenants (101:77), moreover, all but canonizes the Constitution of the United States and admonishes Mormons to respect the laws of any land in which they may reside.

Several comparisons remain which appear to be both legitimate and significant: a period of anxiety; a revealed, ethnically-oriented yet potentially universal religion represented as being consistent with preceding scriptures; an economically cohesive theocracy guided by inspiration through the prophet; and schism over the question of succession and relinquishment of direct political authority. These comparisons, though, are also very general, so much so that they could apply to many religious figures or movements, but when these are coupled with the oversimplifications (visions of angels, sacred books, polygamy, and political power), they constitute in the minds of many a rather well-founded parallel. In order to complete our assessment of the analogy, it is thus necessary to turn from an analysis of content to an analysis of method.

In referring to Joseph Smith as an "American Muhammad," many writers, wanting only to flavor their narratives with a literary metaphor, probably mean no more than that each prophet fulfilled approximately similar historical roles. The only difficulty with such a use of analogy is that biases toward Muhammad seem to crop up whenever praise or blame is imputed. Before acknowledging that Joseph Smith possessed as much "moral courage" as Muhammad, for example, one must first agree that the Arab Prophet was unusually courageous. Likewise, in order to concur that Joseph's actions were "equally as devious" as those of Muhammad, one would have to assume that the Messenger of Allah was a sneaky fellow. Since historical writing is a form of literature, historians are allowed a degree of poetic license. It is only when used for purposes beyond this metaphorical level that analogies begin to be misleading.

One is, for example, a bit skeptical of those who have interpreted parallels between the teachings of Islam and Mormonism as evidence that Joseph Smith borrowed certain dogmas from Muhammad.⁴⁸ Richard Burton pursued this theme at considerable length in his *City of the Saints*. Mormonism, he said, "is imitative to an extent that not a vestige of originality appears" (p. 410). He even retraced the origin of various dogmas, mentioning such sources as the Illuminati and the Druses. From Islam, according to Burton, Joseph obtained the ideas for polygamy and a physical resurrection. The apostolic title, "Lion of the Lord," he added, was "literally borrowed from El Islam" (p. 410). The ways in which these ideas were "literally borrowed," however, were not specified, and it would be difficult to document the notion that Joseph Smith knew much about Islam beyond Muhammad's name. Bousquet and Thimme investigated this possibility, but the latter confessed that "we do not see any traces of mutual influence and formal connection" ("MI," 155).

⁴⁸*Debates with Historians* (Cleveland: World, 1958), p. 154.

Hans Thimme, the chief advocate for another variation of the basic analogy, was particularly guilty of faulty methodology. In the words of Peter Geyl, he treated "a mental convenience as if it were an objective thing."⁴⁹ He proposed an investigation of "the question of the system or type of religion; whether perhaps Mormonism and Islam belong together as one peculiar type," and he concluded in his summary that as "representatives of the same principle, Mormonism and Islam belong together" ("MI," 166-67). It is for this reason that Thimme insisted on the exclusion of Mormonism from Christianity because of its tendency to undervalue human sinfulness. He thus created for the two faiths a special category based on the idea that neither recognizes original sin — surely an arbitrary reason for divorcing a denomination from its Christian heritage and pairing it with Islam. Thimme appears to have employed what he called comparative religion primarily for the purpose of sectarian polemics. Reminiscent of early anti-Mormon writers, his special category was simply a device for equating the two religions in order to discredit the one by associating it with the other. Individual dogmas of the two faiths might constructively be contrasted to delineate the similarities and the differences, but no classification of Mormonism can be meaningful which denies its essential Christianity.

In putting the analogy to still another use, Eduard Meyer showed the strong influence of Hegel's idea of the *Zeitgeist* or time spirit, a dialectical force moving through history and determining the course of events. Although the trend of development is upward and linear rather than cyclical, its rate may vary considerably from region to region. It is therefore possible for similar conditions, persons, and events to evolve in historical circumstances widely separated by time and space. In his introduction, Meyer cautioned that his explanation "will be comprehensive only if the reader keeps in mind the picture of very primitive ways of thinking in the midst of a culture which is highly developed in many of its other forms" (*OHM*, v). In other words, seventh-century Arabia and nineteenth-century frontier America were on the same "primitive" level, and so the *Zeigeist* produced nearly identical movements in Islam and Mormonism. This helps explain why Meyer insisted that "neither Joseph Smith nor Mohammed were towering personalities" (*OHM*, ii). In such a *Weltanschauung* as Meyer's there are few heroes; there are mainly lumps of human clay molded by the forces of history. In fact Meyer did not undertake the study of Mormonism for its own sake, but rather for what it could teach him about Islam, whose origins were much more obscure. "This new religion grew up during the nineteenth century," he observed, "so that we can pursue its origin and history by means of rich, contemporary sources. . . . The forms under which it appeared gave reason to hope for important conclusions regarding the understanding of Mohammed and his religion" (*OHM*, 1). He added that "there is hardly a historical parallel which is so instructive as this one; and through comparative analysis both [Islam and Mormonism] receive so much

⁴⁹"In that identification," Geyl explained (*Debates with Historians*, p. 152), "the human factor is overlooked, and it is with the human factor that history is, above all, concerned." In this regard, Samuel Eliot Morison accused Marxist historians of the "mass murder of historical characters" by treating them as "puppets of social and economic forces." "Faith of a Historian," *American Historical Review*, 56 (January, 1951), 270.

light that a scientific study of the one through the other is indispensable" (OHM, 44).

Meyer's use of the analogy risks violating the traditions of historical methodology in two important ways. First, it ignores the widely divergent circumstances which separated nineteenth-century America from seventh-century Arabia. Secondly, it shears both Muhammad and Joseph Smith of their individuality by suggesting, as Peter Geyl put it, "that an identity exists between the processes of history and those of organic nature."⁵⁰ Certainly neither Islam nor Mormonism can exempt itself from academic scrutiny, but by intimating that two weak-willed prophets were produced by identical, primitive historical situations and that conclusions about the one can be attributed almost unconditionally to the other, Eduard Meyer was clearly in error. A balanced study should neither ignore the historical context nor compromise individuality for the sake of a facile generalization. For all our emphasis on similarities, we must not fail to recognize important differences.

MORMONISM AND ISLAM CONTRASTED

The final portion of this essay will consider dissimilarities which our writers, so anxious for their analogy to be accepted, have either minimized or ignored. Meyer spoke of "numerous small differences," such as the idea of continuous revelation in Mormonism as against the Islamic belief that revelation ended with Muhammad (OHM, 54). The differences are nevertheless profound. We suggest the following three areas of contrast.

The core of religion is the concept of God, and on this issue the two prophets moved in opposite directions. Islam's most significant contribution was the convincing of a people who worshipped many gods that there was only one God. Although there is some evidence that it initially pictured Allah only as the chief diety (summotheism), Muhammad's faith soon emerged as one of the most uncompromising monotheisms the world has ever known. The gravest sin a Muslim can commit is *shirk* (ascribing partners to Allah). Muslim writers frequently level this charge against Christians for their belief in the Trinity, although Ibn Taymiya and his spiritual descendants, the Unitarians of Saudi Arabia, severely condemned the popular Muslim concept of *tawassul* or entreaty through a *wali* or saint as *shirk*. Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, not only insist that the Godhead is composed of three distinct personages but hold as well that by adhering to divine principles men can attain godhood (D&C 132:20, 37). This concept led Sterling McMurrin to call Mormonism "a thoroughgoing pluralism."⁵¹ Also, Muslim orthodoxy gradually explained away hints of anthropomorphism in the Koran, insisting that God is outside of time and above human attributes. Conversely, Mormonism teaches that God is eternally progressing but materially embodied. Moreover, Islam views the universe without equivocation as the creation of God, having its origin and its only claim to existence in the divine mind; yet Mormonism holds that matter *per se* is coeternal with God, who "organized" the universe rather than created it.

⁵⁰*The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1960), p. 8.

The germane concept of man's relationship to God demonstrates a second point of divergence. Religions vary in the extent to which their deity is approachable, and in Islam the gulf between God and man is wide indeed. Allah is unknowable (at least in the pre-sufi period), and even though Sufis can achieve a kind of mystical union with God, no Muslim can ever hope to behold Him. This popular conception of *wasila* or a special relationship with God was also condemned by Ibn Taymiya as it has been by the Unitarians in their attempt to reestablish the spiritual values and practical ideals of pristine Islam. In Mormonism the gap narrows considerably as it does, of course, in all Christian groups. Men are literally considered in Mormonism to be spiritual offspring of God; and although the Father is presently exalted far above His children, they have not only the power to know Him but the possibility to become like Him. Further, predestination triumphed over free will in Muslim theology so that orthodox Islam views human actions as being determined by the will of God. Yet Mormonism has remained an uncompromising advocate of free agency and of the necessity for works in addition to grace and faith.

Finally, Islam has no clergy, and its theology provides no role for ordained clerics. Despite the development of the '*ulama*' or theological and legal expert, there is no central hierarchy which can speak for Islam as a whole. On the other hand, virtually all male Latter-day Saints are ordained to the lay clergy, for the institution of the priesthood is the core of Mormonism and the rite of ordination is considered necessary for individual salvation. Furthermore, the Mormon Church is administered by a highly organized, rigidly centralized ecclesiastical government which can and does speak for all Mormons. It is remarkable that two religions reputed to be so similar should be structured so differently. It is even more remarkable that almost none of those who have compared the two faiths admitted the existence of such obvious differences.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, to call Joseph Smith an American Muhammad or Mormonism the Islam of America is to draw an analogy that obscures and minimizes the very important differences that exist. While two out of every three points of comparison are either untrue or oversimplified, the very analogy itself is an oversimplification. Islam is an umbrella for numerous sects and legal rites that are set apart one from the other as radically as Mormonism is set apart from other Christian sects. Thus in even considering the analogy one must isolate those features that are common to all these divergent sects, and as one will have observed this has not been in all cases possible. Rather than having employed constructively the tool of historical analogy, those writers utilizing this analogy have all too often merely revealed their own preconceptions, born of dogmatic or philosophic bias. However poetic it may be to designate Mormonism as the "Islam of America," the analogy has in the final analysis contributed little to an understanding of either religion.