

Notes On Islam

Founded by the prophet **Muhammad** (born 570, CE). Claimed direct revelation from God in 609, CE. Not a Jew but admires Jewish monotheism and Hebrew scriptures. Critical of polytheism of indigenous tribes of the Arabian peninsula.

Key concept: absolute unity of God (**Allah**). Christian church by this time is sharply divided over the status of Jesus. Led Arabs familiar with Christian teachings to ask such questions as: Was the doctrine of the Trinity a type of polytheism? Is the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist truly the eating and drinking of human flesh and blood? Christianity, they decided, is not a pagan religion because it believes in the one God of the Hebrew scriptures, the god who is also revealed to Muhammad. They, like Jews, are “people of the Book” and have received a part of God’s message to mankind. Only in the **Qu’ran**, the scriptures mediated by the last of the prophets is Allah’s full message completely revealed. The Jews’ failure to acknowledge the teachings of Jesus shows that they did not comprehend what God has revealed and the Christians’s failure to acknowledge Muhammad as the last and greatest prophet shows that they have not understood what was revealed to them, even distorting it by making the one God into three gods.

Mecca - religious center and place of pilgrimage. Cubical structure (the **Ka’bah**) housing an ancient black meteorite. The clan of Muhammad’s father was in control of the Ka’bah.

Muhammad had no formal education. He was a camel driver and tradesman. He married wealthy widow (Khadija). Fathered six children. Became convinced of monotheism, concerned for the salvation of his polytheistic, idolatrous countrymen. During a time of solitary religious reflection, he receives a visitation from the angel **Gabriel (Jibril)**, bringing a revelation from Allah. These visitations are repeated over the following ten years. Being illiterate, he memorizes message, dictating it later. These writings become the Qur’an. According to the Qur’an,

Allah has revealed himself through a number of prophets, from Adam through Jesus. After Muhammad's death, a major split within Islam occurs between those (the minority) who maintain that Muhammad did not name a successor (the **Shi'ites**) and those (the majority) who maintain that he did (the **Sunnis**). Many doctrinal differences develop on both sides of the split.

“**Islam**” - literally means ‘submission’ (to God). “**Muslim**” - ‘one who submits (to God).**Five Pillars of Islam** - central doctrines (daily reciting of the creed, daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, almsgiving and pilgrimage to Mecca).