

Muhammad the Islamic Prophet: Reflections from within the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Prophecy

Dr. Dube Edmore¹

¹ (Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Mashava Campus, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe)

Abstract: *This paper sought to discuss the prophecy of Muhammad in the context of prophecy in the Ancient Near East (ANE). The research has used the descriptive and comparative methodologies; namely the phenomenological and anthropological approaches. As a phenomenon the nature of Muhammad's prophecy was not unique to Arabia. It was in fact closely connected with the general nature of prophecy across the region. Field research has dismissed any uniqueness of the Arabian prophecy. If anything it has close affinity with the Jewish and Christian prophecy for which it claims common Abrahamic origins. In that line of prophets Muslims emphasize that Muhammad becomes the final capping of God's revelations. The treatise has noted that it took centuries for the prophecy of Muhammad to win hearts among the Christian faithful and scholarship in the west. It was not until the Second Vatican Council that the polemics against Muhammad and Islam receded. The Vatican Synod removed the doctrinal basis for the polemics by recognizing that those outside the Church could earn salvation from without and that Islam was one of the religions ordered towards salvation. Having acknowledged Islam as ordered towards salvation it became logical that Muhammad's prophecy was also authentic.*

Key words: *Arabian Prophet, Ecstasy, prophetic authority, polemics*

I. Introduction

Modern scholarship has unearthed many anomalies in the accreditation of prophethood to figures of antiquity including those credited with founding religions. Careful phenomenological and anthropological definitions of prophecy have exposed many follies and polemics of ancient prejudicial scholarship. The prejudices were spurred by the Church's dogmatic position that "outside the Church no salvation at all" (Knitter, 1985, p.122 [1]) This led to the stigmatization and persecution of anyone "outside the Church" deemed to teach any other salvation than the one ending in Christ; and the prophethood of Muhammad ran in the face of this dogmatic teaching. Gradually it has dawned on scholarship that many figures including Muhammad the Islamic prophet indeed qualify to be called prophets. The current paper attempts a description of prophecy in relation to the Ancient Near East (ANE) including the Semitic Arabia. It leans heavily on the accepted Israelite prophecy in order to draw the yawning but often ignored parallels with the often labelled false prophecy of Muhammad. The spirit of this paper is informed by Eric Sharpe's position that in dealing with an external religious and cultural phenomenon the paradigm "is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy" (Sharpe, 1977, p.108 [2])

1.1 Hypothesis

Minus the kernel of hatred born out of religious competition both Muslims and Christians are bound to accept Muhammad as one of the Major Abrahamic prophets calling upon people to immediately leave their wanton ways and follow the only God. Factual and professional research is likely to break down the barriers of trust separating the Christen and Muslim fiefdoms.

1.2 Justification

Where an ideological position leads to the prevention of cordial human intercourse, it is the duty of the scholar to express his positive dismay in a critical way. It has dawned on both Catholics and Protestants that differences for their sake lead to human catastrophe; and the two bodies have capitulated. Taking cue from their call for dialogue this paper has sought to present the truth without "anathemas and condemnations" (Abbot, et al 1967, 11 [3]); which are the saucy building blocks for peace. The phenomenological and anthropological descriptive approaches used in this paper generally avoid the a priori ideological in-bedding.

II. Research Design and Methodology

The research employed two noble methods of data gathering, recording and analysis; methods that put the believer at the centre. The phenomenological and anthropological approaches have taken the

centre stage due to their openness and meticulousness in field work. These two theoretical frameworks informed the way field work was carried out in the case study style best suited for these largely qualitative methods.

2.1 The Phenomenological Method

The theoretical method utilized in this research is the phenomenological method. According to W. B. Kristensen (cited by Bettis, 1969, p1 [4]), an early phenomenologist, “there is no religious reality other than the faith of the believers” and therefore at the end of any research the researcher must always acknowledge that, “the believers were completely right” (Bettis, 1969, p.49 [5]). It is in this light that the research has made the believers its primary source of information. By giving the believers the preference, the thesis avoided what J. D. Bettis (1969, p.1 [6]) terms “abstract *a priori* standards of academic disciplines.” In a way it applied what E. Husserl (cited by E. Sharpe, 1986, p.224 [7]), has called *epoche*, from the Greek word *epocho* meaning to “hold back” or to suspend value judgements as to whether something is true or false.

The researcher’s participation in the observations where possible, was also in line with the phenomenological stage of “performing empathetic interpolation” (Cox, 1992, 1992, p.38 [8]) This entails putting oneself in the believer’s place and describing the phenomena from within, rather than imposing conclusions from without. The performance of *eidetic vision* (Husserl, cited in Sharpe, 1986, p.224 [9]) followed this stage of empathetic interpolation. This stage was meant to account for what religion meant to the Muslims. According to Husserl, this vision accounts for the observer’s ability to deduce the real essence of the phenomena independent of preconceptions, or popular declarations. Accordingly, one’s conclusion must always be based on the phenomena and the believer’s understanding of it.

Though the research utilised this method which is a step away from the compartmentalising interpretive methods such as the sociological and theological methods, the researcher was aware of the limitations of this broadly open method. For example, it was the researcher, through the believers, who tried to construct meanings with the help of the believers. The researcher was however pleased with the effort, for although it was not possible to say that the conclusions were purely objective, the very endeavour to be objective rather than compartmentalizing and relying on earlier conclusions was a step in the positive direction (Dube, 2013, p.7 [10]). As demonstrated later it actually became necessary to vary some of the early conclusions made by researchers.

2.2 Anthropological Method

Anthropology deals with the study of human relations. “To take an anthropological approach is to study a culture by participant observation without using any of your own value systems to judge it. You study the culture as a member of the culture and define it in its own terms. You look at everything from subsistence (how they feed themselves) to ideas, religion, art and relationships. It is having a holistic approach” (<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081>) [11]

It is important to note that the anthropological approach dismisses a priori biases by its emphasis on prolonged research contact. It was for this reason that the researcher made a long time contact with important personalities in the urban case study discussed below. The approach is particularly hand by “...its emphasis on cross-cultural comparisons, long term in-depth examination of context, and the importance it places on participant observation or experimental immersion in the area of research. Cultural anthropology in particular has emphasized cultural relativism, holism, and the use of findings to frame cultural critiques” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropology). [12]

In Cultural anthropology in particular, “interviews and surveys are part of anthropological methodology.” (<https://www.google.co.zw/#q=cultural+anthropology>) [13] The current research has utilised interviews as part of its data gathering techniques. This was complemented by general observations. This method is quite handy in studying religion as part of human culture (www.aaanet.org>AboutAAA) [14]

III. Prophecy

The current layman’s usage of the word ‘prophet’ denotes one who can foretell the future; for example, a weather prophet. In the Ancient Near East (ANE) “prophecy basically meant making known the will of God” (Fleming, 1988, 240 [15]). The ANE perception was not futuristic but making known the will of God here and now. Aaron was Moses’ spokesman, and was referred to as Moses’ prophet and Moses as Aaron’s god (Ex 4:10-16; 7:1-2). Being Moses’ prophet meant that he was making known the words from Moses ‘here and now.’ The words were being made known to the people just as they left Moses’ mouth. On the other hand Moses was referred to as Aaron’s god because the words spoken by Aaron had their visible source in Moses. As religious words had their source in a god, Moses being the visible source of the divine words was by the same corollary ‘a god.’ Of course Moses was just a conduit through which the words of Yahweh (God) reached the people via

Aaron. Likewise the Quranic revelations generally related to solutions for the current problems. A case in point is the revelation on polygamy following the deaths of many men in the battle of Uhud (Watt, 1961, 151 [16]).

Prophets Micaiah (I Kings 22:7-8), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5, 9), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:4, 27) and Amos (Amos 3:7) are presented as spokespersons of God whose business was to make known the will of God even against stiff opposition. This made true prophets unpopular appointees of God (Amos 7:15). Stiff opposition and unpopularity were marks of true prophecy because the true prophet called for urgent behaviour change. Amos called for justice in blunt terms such as: "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are in the mountain of Samaria... you shall go through the breeches, every one before her; and you shall be cast forth into Harmon..." (4:1-3). The sequel exposes Muhammad's tenacious voice equally calling for social justice in Mecca, in the same robust Semitic messenger style (Hitti, 1970, p.114 [17]).

Such terms as messenger of God (Haggai 1:13) and servant of God (Jeremiah 7:25) were often used in respect of the functional reading of the work of the prophets. Because they sometimes received their messages through visions they also earned the title 'seer' (I Samuel 9:9, 18f; Zechariah.1:7f). Muhammad saw a glorious Being on the horizon (Surah 53:1-18). People often consulted prophets (I Samuel 9:11f) as God's word was needed in decision making (II Samuel 7:1-3, I Kings 22: 6-8). The matters brought before the prophet ranged from domestic issues such as Saul looking for his father's lost asses (I Samuel 9: 11f), to religious matters in respect of a blind man seeking explanations about faith from Muhammad (Surah 80). These "prophets were concerned chiefly not with foretelling events, but with leading the people of God to repentance and faith" (Fleming, 1988, p.241 [18]). The emphasis was on how people should act 'now.' Elijah asked people to decide immediately between Baal and Yahweh and after the decisive sign they fell for Yahweh. The miracle was meant to enforce an immediate decision (I Kings 18:38f).

According to Brown et al (1968, p.187 [19]), "most religions, if not all, have produced the phenomenon of prophecy either continuously or at some stage in their development. This observation holds good not only for the so-called primitive religions but also for the highly sophisticated ones." Brown (1968, p.187 [20]) sees a prophet as a mediator and interpreter of divine will. The term '*prophetes*' in use since the 5th century BCE, the root of the current term '*prophet*,' literally means "one who speaks for another," or "interpreter" (Brown et al 1968, p.187 [21]). The channels for communication were dreams, visions, ecstatic or mystical experiences. The current study is anchored on the epithet: "*Our respect for the prophets of Israel does not require us to deny that many non-Israelite prophecies resulted from genuine religious experiences*" [emphasis mine] (Brown et al, 1968, p.187 [22]).

3.1 Prophecy in the Ancient Near East (ANE)

The anchor for the current study is vindicated by the observation that the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures were superior to the Israelite culture; and that a common pattern of seers and diviners existed throughout the ANE. Comparative studies, especially phenomenology, have shown that there were strikingly similar features in the prophetic activities of the people of the ANE. On the basis of these similarities are proposed common origins of the phenomenon (Bishau and Mazodze, 2010, p.3 [23]). The existence of ecstatic prophecy in the 11th century in Phoenicia is attested by the Wen Ammon incident. The Wen Ammon story provides two features common with the prophecy of Muhammad, which are ecstasy and prophetic authority; both of which shall be discussed below. The legend of Zimri-Lim describes a seer who visited the legendary king Zimri-Lim with the oracle: "I am the god who made you king over Mesopotamia. If you obey, I will bless you, if you disobey, I will punish you" (Pritchard, 1955, pp.33ff [24]). Of importance here are the oracular form and the ecstatic behaviour of the seer (cf Surah 96:1 "Recite in the name of your Lord who created"). Ecstasy and prophetic authority were heavily invested upon Muhammad as shall be attempted below.

Ecstatic prophecy also existed among Israelite prophets (I Samuel 10:5-7, 10-13) and Baal prophets hosted by Jezebel the Queen of Israel (I Kings 18:19-40). During ecstasy the spirit of God (*ruah*) "takes control of the centre of the self, and makes one an instrument of the divine will" (Anderson, 1957, p.250 [25]). Samuel told Saul that he would be turned into "another person" (cf I Samuel 19:19-24). Anderson (1957, p.250 [26]) maintains that "usually we use the word 'ecstasy' to describe an experience of being overcome with an emotion so powerful that self-control or reason may be suspended." As discussed below the case in point is the state in which Muhammad delivered his oracles.

The Babylonian ecstatic prophets (*mahu*) were priest prophets (Brown et al, p.187 [27]). These are comparable to the Israelite prophets Samuel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who were also priestly prophets. It is interesting to note that the Arabic term for prophet, '*kahin*,' is derived from the Hebrew '*kohen*' meaning priest (Brown et al, 1968, p.188 [28]). Of importance are techniques and deliverance of messages from deities. It is also important that these prophetic activities predate the Arabian prophecy and that Prophet Muhammad acknowledged them as genuine.

3.2 Prophecy and Politics

Prophecy was intimately associated with politics from the very beginning (I Samuel 10:5-13). The prophetic band was stationed next to the Philistine garrison inciting the Israelites for a holy war against the Philistines. The prophets were called to deliver a specific message for a specific political situation. In the days of the monarchy prophets became ambivalent. Those outside the establishment advocated revolutionary social and political change (I Kings 21:20), while those within the establishment called for a more orderly social change (II Samuel 7: 11-17). Prophetic curses and blessings were believed to have efficacious effects (Numbers 22-24). This is precisely why the Moabite king asked Balaam to pronounce a curse against the victorious Israelites. The prophecy of Muhammad was heavily involved with the Arabian politics resulting in the founding of the nation as shall be seen below.

IV. Views on Muhammad as Prophet

4.1 The Eastern Position

Gabrieli (1968, p.7 [29]) says the distortion of the Muhammad legend was split between exaltation and denigration. It was a question of apologetics (idealism) versus polemics. His kin and kith advanced the former while the Christian west advocated the latter. In respect to miracles some Muslims especially the mystics exaggerated his feats to the point of deifying him. On the contrary Muhammad himself barred any moves towards deifying him and declared that the only living Islamic miracle was the Quran (Gabrieli, 1968, p.10 [30]). Many passages in the Quran challenge the unbelievers to produce a similar miracle. The miraculous nature of the Quran became dogma in the true sense of the word in relation to the *ijaz* or the immutability of the Quran. The Quran being miraculous makes the prophet a mere conduit of revelation. For that reason Muhammad has human fallibility (Surah 80), for he is reproved for sending away the blind man who sought the explanation of faith, while Muhammad was busy ingratiating himself with the Makkan aristocracy (Gabrieli, 1968, pp.10f [31]). This view however progressively grew dimmer in relation to *isma* (divine protection from error). In this regard he became the paragon of virtues: patience, humility, mercy, generosity, courage and fortitude. He was also viewed as a historical Makkan merchant and abled realistic Medinese head of state. In this regard the question of Muhammad as the eternal Logos is wholly foreign to him and to this orthodox school of thought which is strictly monotheistic.

4.2 The Medieval Christian Position

The west saw Muhammad as a Christian apostate and Islam as a heresy based on Muhammad's base instincts (Gabrieli, 1968, p.12 [32]). This argument is based on Muhammad's contact with Bahira the Syrian Christian monk who divined his prophetic mission. The story of Bahira appeared in the *Sira*, the Muslim biography of Muhammad. More historical is the person of Waraqa, Khadija's Christian cousin. Bahira (Gabrieli, 1968, p.14 [33]), also known as Serge, is described as bitter and malicious monk, bishop or cardinal bent on schism. Muhammad becomes Bahira's vile rod of anger. The west claimed that during Muhammad's epileptic feats he declared sexual license, blasphemed about the divinity of Christ and with many tricks attracted many. The alleged sexual license received the greatest attention in the west. For such sins and errors he fell headlong into hell where Dante found him among the sowers of scandal and schism. Muhammad is treated as a nefarious being. The enlightened Christian apologetics have abandoned the frantic vitriol approach and adopted the conciliatory approach which avoids the attack of the person of Muhammad (Gabriel, 1968, p.15 [34]). The middle Ages Christian church portrays Muhammad as a false prophet.

4.3 The Christian Enlightenment

The European Enlightenment was more open to a balanced judgement. The French biography of Muhammad by De Boulainvilliers (1730) and the English translation of the Quran by Sale opened up a more positive picture of Muhammad. Muhammad is seen as the sage and lawgiver comparable to Theseus (Gabriel, 1968, p.16 [35]). There were mixed voices and Voltaire dismissed this view in *Mahomet (1742)* and *Essai Sur les Moeurs* which describe Muhammad as an immoral man who fought his Makkan people; destroyed men and women in the name of the holy book. Enlightenment, however, left Muhammad a secular non-Christian legislator. A Catholic scholar G. Guidi "is inclined to allow the founder of Islam a providential role, as 'the one way of winning souls too far removed from the truth, sunk in the horror of the grossest idolatry, to the acknowledgement of divine supremacy, and the affirmation of a system of just rewards and punishments, and of homage to the one true God of all humanity'" (Gabriel, 1968, p.20 [36]).

The understanding was that monotheism reached him through Christianity. Gabrieli complains that, "In his judgement of the man himself, Watt has gone beyond any of his western predecessors in his unqualified admiration, which personally we are unable to endorse" (Gabrieli, 1968, p.21 [37]). For Watt Muhammad must be evaluated by the Arabian moral standards of the time and not the gospels, but Gabrieli thinks that these moral

standards were subordinated to the political and moral whims. “Watt’s portrait of him, ministering or denying his ‘alleged moral failures’, seems too close to the Muslim *isma* to be acceptable to a Christian of whatever denomination, or indeed to any modern moral consciousness” (Gabrieli, 1968, p.21 [38]).

4.4 Modern Scholarship

Gabrieli admits that, “After all this critical study, certain points at least may today be taken as settled. Above all, there is Muhammad’s absolute sincerity in feeling himself the recipient of a special contact with the divine, and the transmitter of a message which was, in the beginning at least, infinitely higher than any ambition or interest of his own. A second point is the dependence of this message for its monotheistic content on the two great religions of the Near East historically prior to that of the Arabian prophet and the precondition of its existence, though he soon came to consider them as completed, perfected and superseded by his own faith” (Gabrieli, 1968, p.22 [39]).

For Gabrieli the most visible institution of Islam is the *tawhid*, the proclamation of divine unity. According to Watt Muhammad often spent several days in the cave praying in solitude (Gabriel, 1968, p.14 [40]). His call began as strange experiences: vivid dreams and visions. He saw a glorious Being on the horizon coming towards him (Surah 53: 1-18). The second time he saw the glorious Being besides a Lote tree near a garden. This second appearance was meant to prove the authenticity of Muhammad’s prophecy. Originally Muhammad must have thought that the glorious Being was God which was contrary to the Semitic view as espoused by the Jews that beholding God would lead to the demise of someone. Later he attributed this Being to a spirit and finally to Gabriel, God’s revelation messenger. When he wished to harm himself the angel intervened: “Thou art the messenger of God.”

Muhammad received revelations at frequent intervals; memorised the revelations and encouraged his followers to do the same in ritual prayer. Muhammad engaged a personal secretary Zayd, who after his death led the compilation of the Quran. The Quran was written on pieces of paper, stones, palm leaves, shoulder blades, ribs and bits of leather. Watt argues that considering the simplicity of life during Muhammad’s day this would make it a great exaggeration. For him the compilation must have started at least 20 years after Muhammad’s death (cc 650 CE).

In the Quran God is using the royal we to address Muhammad and the faithful: “Recite in the name of your Lord who created” (Surah 96). Muhammad was sincere about the belief that the Quran is the true word of God (Gabrieli, 1968, 17 [41]). Hitti (1970, p.112 [42]) says that prior to his call at the end of Ramadan he secluded himself for long periods on Mount Hira praying in a cave; in a manner reminiscent of Elijah on Mount Horeb (I Kings 19: 1ff). He (Hitti, 1970, p.113 [43]) maintains that, “In his call and message the Arabian Muhammad was truly prophetic as any of the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament. God is one.” People laughed and scorned him. He developed into a warner and a prophet of doom showering threats of imminent suffering in hell. The message ran contrary to the economic interests of the Quraysh, the custodians of the Kaabah, the pantheon centre of a pan-Arabian pilgrimage.

Active persecution (Hitti, 1970, p.114 [44]) forced early Muslims to take refuge in Abyssinia and later al Madinah. “Undaunted through these dark days of persecution by the temporary loss of many followers, Muhammad fearlessly continued to preach...” (Hitti, 1970, p.114 [45]). Enduring persecution can only be understood in the light that Muhammad understood himself as sent by God. In the same light the Old Testament prophets pronounced: “Thus says the Lord” when addressing the faithful and delivering the word of God. God spoke to men from behind the veil (Surah 42: 50; Watt, 1961, 18 [46]). On receiving revelations Muhammad felt pain, heat and heard noise like reverberating bells and would sweat even in cold days. The west called this epilepsy, but Watt believes that epilepsy leads to physical and mental retardation but Muhammad maintained his faculties. He notes that a psychologist can never dismiss the content of the religious experiences based on the physical accompaniments of hierophanies. The state Muhammad went into during revelation can be equated to the ecstatic movements of the ANE prophets prior to his time. Jeremiah for example had many ecstatic lamentations in which he complained that if he tried to stop prophesying he felt something like ‘a powerful fire burning in his bones,’ compelling him to go on.

Muhammad encouraged the recitation of the Quran. The recitation may have been in line with public worship as the Arabs valued eloquence as the final of the three attributes (archery, horsemanship, eloquence) associated with “the perfect man” (Hitti, 1970, p.91 [47]), but was later attached to each revelation and the entire Quran. As a prophet he was a warner about the coming judgement at the end of life. Khadija and Waraqa encouraged him in his prophecy.

V. Paul Knitter and the Catholic Model

The development of Catholic thought on other religions reaches maturity in the Second Vatican Synod. Vatican II forms the watershed of the Catholic views on interreligious dialogue. Knitter starts by giving the background to the Catholic model that he says, “represents, as it were, the ‘end point’ in confessional Christian

efforts to come to a more positive theology of other religions. Even the so-called liberal theologians, Catholic and Protestant, do not venture beyond it” (Knitter, 1985, p.120 [48]). The Catholic position developed from the position of “anonymous Christianity.” For Justin Martyr all those who live by the word of Jesus are already Christians although they may never have heard about Jesus Christ (Knitter, 1985, p.121 [49]). Tertullian stresses the same point with his notion of “the naturally Christian soul” (Knitter, 1985, p.121 [50]). Before the second Vatican Council the Catholic Church applied meticulously the Origen-Cyprian (d.254; 258 respectively) position: “outside the church no salvation” (Knitter, 1985, p.121 [51]). To this statement the fourth Lateran Council (1215) added “at all” (Knitter, 1985, p.122 [52]). The Council of Florence (1442), that maintained the tempo added, “no persons, whatever almsgiving they have practiced, even if they shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless they have remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church” (Knitter, 1985, p.122f [53]).

It is this exclusive salvation model that the Second Vatican Council abandoned by recognizing various other channels of grace. Knitter quotes Karl Rahner an architect of Vatican II as saying, “No longer should the Christians consider the Church as an island of salvation surrounded by a sea of perdition. And no longer should the missionaries find their motivation in the belief that they must preach to ‘pagans’ who otherwise would have little chance for salvation” (Rahner in Knitter, 1985, p.129 [54]).

The simple logic that Rahner worked with was that if God willed to save all humanity then God would act on his own will and nothing could deter him from that. If Catholics must work their salvation in a religion, then the same must be expected of Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims.

Since the Second Vatican Council Catholics have looked at Muslims as partners in dialogue. First, Paul VI created a secretariat for dialogue with non-Christians in 1964. The secretariat comprised an Episcopal committee of bishops and lay people from all over the world, to keep the Vatican up to date with issues on dialogue. The first reference to Muslims appeared in 1964 in the *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic constitution on the Church) paragraph 16, which said, “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, among whom are, in the first place Muslims. These profess to have the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, judge of humankind on the Last Day” (Michael and Fitzgerald, 1994, p.5 [55]).

The *Lumen Gentium* was a foretaste of the third paragraph of the *Nostra Aetate* (Michael and Fitzgerald, 1994, p.6 [56]). In October 1965, the council produced the *Nostra Aetate*: the Vatican document on interreligious dialogue. In this particular document Vatican II removed the theological basis for the disdain of Muslims, by stating categorically that, “The Catholic church has high regard for Muslims.” Exhorting its followers to dialogue with believers of other faiths, the Catholic Church directs them to “acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture,” since there is something “true and holy among these religions” (Abbot et al, 1967, p.662 [57]).

The *Nostra Aetate* singles out Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam for special praise. For the first time in the history of the Church, religions of the world are singled out and praised. This peak of maturation is what Knitter calls “the watershed.” And a watershed it is indeed when we consider what comes before Vatican II. Pietro Rossano, holds the council documents to stress, “that gifts of ‘grace and truth’ do reach or may reach the hearts of men and women through the visible, experiential signs of the various religions” (Knitter, 1985, p.124 [58]). This aspect goes beyond the Protestant general revelation which holds that revelation is the source of all religions but salvation is found only in Christ. Nevertheless Samartha (1971) the secretary of the WCC described Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus as “men of living faiths.”

During this paradigm shift Eric Sharpe refers to Warren’s most quoted passage which runs: “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival. We have, then, to ask what is the authentic religious content in the experience of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, or whoever he may be?” (Sharpe, 1977, pp.22f [59]).

5.1 Implications of the Paradigm Shift

The implications of the paradigm shift are that having recognized Islam as ordered towards salvation meant that its founder was also an authentic prophet. It was like a snake shedding off its old coarse scales for a new coat. The world of polemics and anathemas was over. Both Catholics and Protestants acknowledged Muslims as “men of living faiths” despite some doctrinal differences regarding the person of Christ.

VI. Sampled Communities

The researcher sampled views from the Mashava and Masvingo urban Muslim communities. Questions about prophecy were put to them. One senior member of the Mucheke mosque in Masvingo urban said since Muhammad ‘is the seal of the prophets’ he is not the only prophet. He referred the current researcher to the shahadah which runs, “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet,” as authenticating the prophecy

of Muhammad. Muslims noted that of all statements uttered by Muslims the Shahadah is the most popular. One imam said it was the corner stone of Islamic doctrines. Some patrons of the Mashava mosque said that Muhammad was closest to Jesus who they acknowledged as the Jewish prophet who brought the Gospel (Ingil). While they denied the divinity of Jesus they acknowledged his sacred mission as efficacious. Two worshippers at Masvingo CBD mosque accepted that the strict monotheism in Islam emanates from God and is the same commanded through Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. They acknowledged that Judaism and Christianity in their original pure forms are identical to the message of the Quran. They further noted that the only problem is that the current practices of these two Semitic religions are based on some error that has corrupted them. For these Muslim communities error meant any apparent contradiction with the Quran because of its *ijaz*. This immutability of the Quran is based on its being the microcosm of the macrocosm; a replica of the original Quran in heaven. The foregoing however shows that there is no doubt among the Muslims that the message given to Muhammad is the same one given to the prophets before him. Sheikhs and imams noted that what guaranteed the purity of the Quran was the recitation of the message and its immediate documentation through Zayd the prophet's secretary. One imam noted that employing secretaries was common among Semitic prophets. He cited Baruch who was prophet Jeremiah's secretary.

VII. Conclusion

Apart from doctrinal differences it is guaranteed that Muhammad's prophecy fits like hand in glove into the prophecy of the Ancient Near East. Like any Ancient Near Eastern prophet before him Muhammad delivered his message in oracular form. He arguably received his messages in ecstasy and had renowned prophetic authority which led to the Quran and his own Sunnah (biography) being fossilised as the first and second sources of the supreme Islamic Law, the Shariah. Like Moses he took the political aspect of prophecy to the founding of the nation, through eloquence and the armed struggle. Like the Moses traditions which have been legalised as the all meaning Torah, so has the Sunnah of Muhammad. Muhammad like his predecessors asked for immediate action of repentance, a feat which attracted an unfathomable scorn and derision. Following in the footsteps of his acknowledged predecessors, he rode through the storm of problems to victory. No prophet in history has ever been known to give up.

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