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EDM-JS

Eduard Meyer's Comparison of
Mohammed and Joseph Smith

REPRINT

EDUARD MEYER'S COMPARISON OF MOHAMMED & JOSEPH SMITH (Italics ours)

In this report we follow Eduard Meyer's Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen. (1912). Why?

Eduard Meyer (1855-1930): "His Geschichte des Altertums is considered to be the last word in modern historiography and the most perfectly documented and soundly reasoned a resumé of what is actually known about the peoples of Antiquity." (Encyclop. Illustrada). "Possessing a perfect knowledge of the Classic World, both Greek and Roman, master of the language and cultures of some of the major civilizations of the Orient (especially Hebrew and Egyptian) . . . he had the qualities necessary for the undertaking. The project was not original, but never before (or since) had it been undertaken by anyone with a comparable preparation." (Encl. Italiana). "He had a special preference for the History of Religion which never left him, from his Dissertation (at the age of twenty) to the great work of his old age, The Origin and Beginnings of Christianity." (Brockhaus).

The great Classical scholar, Prof. W. Jaeger, says Meyer's lectures were only interesting when he spoke about the Mormons. Only then, according to Jaeger, was the lecture-hall packed.

"Among the religious innovations of our time, Mormonism excited my interest at an early age, before all else because of the surprising analogy extending even to the smallest details, between it and the fundamental drives, external forms, and historical development of Islam: here one might hope to discover significant clues for a proper understanding of Mohammed and his religion. But no less in its own right is Mormonism one of the most instructive phenomena in the whole area of Religious History; and it is most remarkable (thought not without many parallels in every area of historical study) that students of religion who have sought enlightenment in the most remote, inaccessible, all but incomprehensible religions of the past, have kept themselves strictly aloof from Mormonism and disdained the rich instruction it has to offer . . ."

"It is possible without the slightest exaggeration to designate the Mormons both in their public activities and in their thought forms as the Mohammedans of America. Hence there is hardly another historical parallel as instructive as this one . . . It is impossible to undertake the scholarly investigation of the one without a closer acquaintance with the other. The parallel between Joseph Smith and Mohammed was often pointed out by the contemporaries of the prophet of the Mormons and it is indeed so striking, that it can hardly be overlooked . . . It is directly apparent in the fundamental idea in which the appearance of either prophet is rooted, and accordingly runs through the whole activity and achievement of both."

NOT just another church:

2. "The uniqueness of Mormonism is . . . that it is NOT just another of countless sects, but a new revealed religion . . . we can study its origin and history from an exceptionally rich contemporary store of documents both by its members and their enemies . . . What in the study of other revealed religions can only be surmised after painful research is here directly

accessible in reliable witnesses. Hence the origin and history of Mormonism possesses great and unusual value for the student of Religious History . . ."

50. The common claim that Joseph Smith borrowed from the sects around him will not hold up: "The agreements--literal interpretation of the Bible, nearness of the Millennium, baptism by immersion and the rejection of infant baptism--do not go beyond the scope of things which anybody can take directly from the Bible, and are hence frequently met with among the sectarians, for example, the Baptists."

32. "It is a basic teaching Protestantism that the times of miracles and revelations are past . . . In Joseph Smith's revelations there is no sign of conscious deception or of outside influence."

49. "But the Book of Mormon is nothing but religion; remove the religious parts of it, and the whole book collapses. The very skeleton of the narrative is full of religious tendencies and associations . . . In other words: if we remove from it what certainly comes from Joseph Smith, as good as nothing remains."

Joseph Smith, a clue to all the Prophets:

11. "To say he was simply a swindler no more explains J.S. than it explains Amos or Isaiah or Mohammed or Joanne d'Arc . . . At all times J.S. has the same complete ascendancy over his followers [including Sidney Rigdon] that Mohammed had over Abu Bekr and Omar; none of them ever expressed the slightest doubt of his inspiration, let alone laying bare any purported deception even though many of them fell out with him and were put out of the Church."

53. "Never has a seer or prophet described in such a lucid manner (as in D.&C. 9) what goes on in his consciousness (Innera), as it is here given in perfectly understandable terms. This is exactly the manner in which All prophetic utterances arise; these are the same spiritual things as those experienced by an Isaiah or Jeremiah, a Zoroaster or Mohammed, and countless others--or, for example, by the Maid of Orleans . . . Smith also mixes honest conviction with self-deception and with lies and forgery, which are entirely characteristic of this state of mind." (Meyer believes that all prophets are self-deceived.)

13. It is easier to reach a confident conclusion about Mohammed, Abu Bekr, Omar, than about Joseph Smith or Brigham Young in spite of the relatively much greater amount of material surviving concerning the latter . . . But even where the material is as scarce as it is about Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah or Zoroaster and Hesiod, the psychological problem remains the same. It is the case of Joseph Smith that sheds light on all the others and helps us reach an understanding of the fundamental problem."

26. "For the Mormons God has, naturally, a physical body, just as all spirits have, including the spirits of men--just as they do in the Old Testament and in Islam, or as did the resurrected Jesus, agreeable to the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh."

THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MOHAMMED AND JOSEPH SMITH:

In all the points in which they are alike, according to Meyer, Mohammed and Joseph Smith also resemble all the other prophets. Where the two differ, it is J.S. only who resembles the older prophets:

1. Mohammed emphatically disclaimed the possession of the miraculous gifts and powers held by the prophets of old.
2. Mohammed did not prophecy of the future.
3. Mohammed introduced no new ordinances but accepted the established institutions. The great prophets of the dispensations--Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, all restored or introduced ordinances not on the earth in their time. J.S. restored the rites of the Temple.

81. "In a crude environment and low caste society, Joseph Smith thinks of spiritual things in far cruder and more materialistic way than Mohammed . . . Smith lives and breathes in a magic world as do all those around him, and all of its manifestations, visions, healings, ecstasies, etc., are quite everyday things to him and his followers . . . For Mohammed, on the other hand, the only miracle ("the sign") is the revelation of the words of the divine book (and the earlier events they describe) along with the accompanying appearance of the angel; he forcefully denied possessing any of the other miraculous powers possessed by the ancient prophets; the idea of any miraculous powers in possession of his followers is utterly out of the question."

80. The most important difference between Mohammed and Joseph Smith is that the latter believed "in the continuation of direct prophetic inspiration, along with charismatic gifts of tongues, healing, etc." Almost as important is the doctrine of "the personal inspiration which every faithful member can receive for himself" . . . "Mohammed, on the other hand, knows only the one book, the Bible, of which he has but a dim conception; this book was 'sent down' from time to time to prophets." Both men believed their revelations were in complete accord with this, and represented a new sending down or dispensations.

82. "Both think of God as having corporeal form: but Smith in his first vision sees God Himself, the Father and the Son, just as Moses and others Isaiah, Abraham, Jacob, Paul, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, etc. saw him; while to Mohammed only the angel appears."

60. According to Tabari and Ibn Ishaq, Mohammed's first revelation was followed by a period of desperate doubt and misgiving, during which he even contemplated suicide. He had to be assured by his wife's cousin, the Christian Waraqa, that the vision he had had was not a false one. "For Joseph Smith, on the other hand, it is a most distinctive characteristic, that any such sort of doubt or misgiving is utterly out of the question."

51. "It was a naive confidence in himself which Smith possessed to an astounding degree."

82. "In the tribulations of his earlier years, Mohammed was able to win the loyalty of men of such superior intelligence and high social position as Abu Bekr and Omar and to command their unswerving submission; while Joseph

Smith's followers belonged almost without exception to the dregs of the people, and the first to follow him later fell away and were expelled from the Church."

(Having given their pledges of support to Mohammed, his followers could not break them, being bound by social custom and political and family ties. Many maintained a personal and party loyalty to Mohammed who made light of his prophetic calling; when the conquest started rolling in the lifetime of the Prophet, many joined him frankly because it was the safe and profitable thing to do. On the other hand, many disgruntled persons deserted the dangerous and unpopular cause of Joseph Smith, who never denied his prophetic calling. As Meyer notes, many were "expelled" (thrown out, "ausgestossen") from the Church. Jos. Smith did not solicit their support or make any concessions to them. Meyer's commentary on the followers of Jos. Smith is

THE HOLY BOOKS:

82. "Both believe in the miraculous book which they behold in a vision: but Smith claims that he actually dug it up and kept it in his house until after the 'translation,' when the angel took it back; for Mohammed it always remains in the hands of the angel."

82. "Smith 'translates with the help of the seer-stones which he puts in his hat; Mohammed repeats what the angel reads to him. Smith copies out the peculiar written characters of the holy book; such a thing would never have occurred to Mohammed. Hence, Mohammed's revelations, in spite of all the monotony of the Quran, are definitely superior to those of Joseph Smith; in his case we feel, at least in the earlier Suras, something of the force of a conviction won through genuinely strenuous mental effort, and even at times a poetic exaltation."

42. The Book of Mormon: "The style is clumsy and monotonous in the highest degree . . . the vocabulary is exceedingly limited, except for the numerous peculiar words and proper names invented by the author, in which he gives his imagination free rein . . . It is greatly inferior to the Quran, the monotony and triviality of that book are bad enough; no one but a believer will ever bring himself to reading it clear through."

J.S. accepts all previous Scriptures as still valid. Since all scripture has the same message, it is all valuable and never loses its validity. Islam, on the other hand, regards the Quran as superceding and rendering obsolete all previous Scripture. For this reason even the most learned Moslems are astonishingly ignorant of the Bible.

The Book of Mormon was produced in a very short time by a very young man BEFORE he had any education at all. The Koran was produced by Mohammed over a period of 25 years; it was begun 15 years AFTER Mohammed had become a wealthy man; he had traveled a great deal and come into much contact with Christian and Jewish teachers; many think it insulting to assume that with all his study, travel and important business dealings Mohammed remained illiterate.

71. Mohammed had no witnesses, instead, "With emphatic solemn affirmations and oaths by the works of his might, God affirms the reality of the Prophet's story." It is the Book itself, that constantly reaffirms and passionately asserts its divinity.

24. The Three Witnesses: "The essential thing is, that this vision was for the Three Witnesses an absolutely real occurrence, on the complete and literal actuality of which none of them ever betrayed the slightest trace of a doubt. The opponents of the Mormons made every conceivable effort to get these men to retract their testimonies and to admit that there was a deception; but they remained unshaken, and continued to the end of their lives to affirm the truth of the revelation and the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Far harder to explain is the testimony of the eight witnesses." Meyer gives it up.

28. How explain the witnesses? "But the prophet was no trained hypnotist or magician; he was a completely uneducated person." It was "an environment full of the wildest superstition and the most boundless religious fantasy" that did the trick. To prove this, Meyer, like Mrs. Brodie, describes a revival meeting in Kentucky in 1799!

The teachings of the Koran, like those of the Bible, soon came under the control of the schoolmen. The Jewish and Christian doctors were completely under the spell of the philosophical heritage of the U. of Alexandria; so also the Moslem doctors. It was from them that the scholasticism of the M.A. took its teachings. In every case the basic problem was the same; how to make the One, Incomprehensible, Indescribable, Absolutely simple God of the Philosophers conform to the image of God presented by the Scriptures, and how to reconcile his Sole and Sovereign Will and Absolute and Irresistible Power with a Universe full of struggle, opposition, evil and a humanity free to do as it pleases and capable of wickedness, misery and suffering.

Like Christianity, Islam split into two religions, popular superstition on the one hand, continuing ancient local cult practices all over the Near and Middle East, and abstract philosophical speculation on the other.

Mormonism has never suffered this split and it is commonly denied classification as Christian Church because it does not accept the creeds of the philosophers nor engage in scholastic speculation.

61. While newspapers report Joseph Smith's claims at length in 1829 and 1830, "ALL traditions about Mohammed's beginnings come from a time long after the official tradition had been established," and mostly come from his youngest wife, Ayesha, years after Mohammed had received his official position. In the earliest accounts the angel is not named; only later is he called Gabriel.

THE REAL PARALLEL: MORMONISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY:

The guiding principle of all of Meyer's religious studies is absolute denial of revelation. This was fashionable 50 years ago (see our G-2 Reports I & 2!); it required depicting Jesus as a teacher of morals and nothing more:

278ff. Mormonism is NOT Christian because "Jesus never functioned as a prophet . . . For Him God was only a loving Father whose commands he has a

right to preach as being religiously true . . . Jesus' concept of resurrection had absolutely nothing to do with an afterlife. It is the magical awakening of the body to new life . . . Jesus' activity is totally different from that of John the Baptist, a prophet, or Zoraster, Or Mohammed or Joseph Smith; he is rather a teacher like Buddha, propounding religious truths with the authority of their inner evidence . . . But Christianity is NOT the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth," the Gospels were invented and attributed to him many years after his death. "Unlike Joseph Smith, Jesus NEVER claimed direct revelation, to say nothing of materializing such things; NEVER did HE have a vision (Note 1. "it goes without saying that the Gospel of John is utterly worthless as a source."), and NEVER once did he predict future events (Footnote: "Of course Mt. 24, etc. since they teach quite differently do not count!") nor ever did he refer in any way to any event taking place on this earth."

For Meyer, Mormonism MOST CLOSELY resembles Primitive Christianity which fortunately had no real connection with Jesus:

277. "During our historical presentation, the thoughts of the reader, as the rise and fortunes of the Mormon Church passed before his eyes, must often have strayed to the beginnings of Christianity . . . The atmosphere in which Christianity arose was also pregnant with magic ideas; supernatural influences of divine and satanic powers were taken for granted and were daily occurrences; the natural course of events was again and again interrupted by miraculous intervention from above . . . visions, appearances of angels and other spiritis, miraculous healings and the casting out of devils meet us at every step of the way. Jesus himself shared those beliefs: for him, too, the constant intervention of the other world was something to be taken for granted . . . The miracles of Jesus were exactly such as are found everywhere in times of religious excitement."

17. The First Vision is "a borrowing from the Transfiguration of Christ . . . Yet to him (J.S.) it was undoubtedly a real experience, which no one was ever able to talk him out of . . . There is no doubt at all that the golden plates, even though his mother and others say they were kept in a box in Smith's house, never existed in the real world."

282-5. The stories of the Transfiguration and the Ascension are pure fiction.

4. n.l. "Jesus of Nazareth and Buddha do not belong among the prophets, and they founded no religions; instead the religions attached themselves to them and their teachings." (The Party Line until about 1930).

59. "Between Mohammed and Joseph Smith there is also in this regard a perfect resemblance (in their personal morals); only in the case of Smith everything is more grotesquely presented, his public career is far more cynical, so that here the prophet cannot be distinguished from the charlatan. That is because he comes from a far lower social level than that of the Arabian Prophet, and because in spite of the outer veneer of civilization his environment was on a level far inferior to that of the . . . courtly aristocracy of Mecca. But there cannot be the slightest doubt, that the same common factors, although to varying degrees, occur in the case of every prophet." Meyer illustrates with Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezechiel. "In the case of Ezechiel the mantle of the prophet is nothing but a mask, and his visions are literary fabrications, mostly of the most disgusting nature; it is doubtful whether he ever experienced a prophet impulse." (Here Meyer brings against Joseph Smith the classic charge ancient made against Christ.)

THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM

2. Mormonism enables us to study "the factors which . . . make possible the construction of a great religion striving for world rule." (Having by his own confession, never studied the Book of Mormon, Meyer is unaware of the clear and repeated prophecies that the Church would not and could not play the dominant role in world history--it was to remain small and poor until the end. This false premise leads Meyer to a false conclusion.)

2. "Though it has not been destroyed, as, for example, was the empire and religion of the Mahdi of Khartum and his Chalijm, (?) still it has sunk from the position of a coming world religion to a sect of something the type of Judaism or the Parsees today."

The Koran is more like the D&C than the Book of Mormon, a number of separate revelations given over a number of years on special occasions. The D&C differs from the Koran in important essentials:

1. It contains many prophecies of things to come.
2. It established holy ordinances.
3. It deals with the organization of the Church in detail.

During the lifetime of Mohammed Islam had a highly centralized theocratic rule. The Prophet held all authority, but he exercised it wisely by seeking the counsel of the Companions, his true and proven friends. No provision was taken for the future government of Islam, however; each of the "Four Legitimate Caliphs" was chosen by chance and intrigue, no principle of succession having been established, and since their day the headship of Islam has ALWAYS been a matter of doubt and dispute.

UNLIKE MORMONISM, ISLAM DOES SEEK TEMPORAL DOMINION:

Qaduri (b. 362 A.H.): Art. 1. "To slay the unbelievers is an obligation even though they have committed no aggression."

Art. 5. "And it is necessary to call upon those who have been invited to receive Islam and have not replied. And if they refuse, ask the help of God against them, and make war upon them and bring up against them machings of war, and send water against them (i.e., burn down their houses), and cut down their trees, and ruin their crops."

Mormonism preaches the continuation of revelation as long as there are worthy people upon the earth. Islam that all revelation ceased forever with Mohammed.

Mormonism teaches that God's people must always be led by prophets. The Early Christians and the Jews also taught this, and both bitterly lamented the loss of the prophets. Islam accepts no prophet since Mohammed--1300 years without a prophet!

The lack of direct revelation set pious Moslems on channels of mysticism and spiritual exercises, exactly as it did the Christians. Such resorts are not necessary where the members of the church are allowed to receive direct revelation.