

Outline Lecture Five—Muhammad and the Founding of Islam

Key Focus:

- 1) Recent events in Europe (Charlie Hebdo, Belgium round-up, Islamophobia etc.)
- 2) Understanding a scholar's claim that "Islam was born in the full light of history"?

I) The Socio-political Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia

- a) The Geopolitical Setting
 - i) Byzantine-Sasanid Conflict throughout 4th to 7th centuries
 - (1) 608-627—last major escalation of conflict
 - ii) Effect on Arabia
 - (1) Trade along the Hijaz Corridor
 - (2) The oasis of Mecca
 - (a) Center for caravan trade
 - (b) Center for pilgrimage
- b) Bedouin Tribalism
 - i) Developed a distinct ethos for *collective* survival
 - ii) Social and political norms
 - (1) Council of elders called the *majlis*
 - (2) Figure of the *sheikh*
 - (a) "*Hilm*" and "*Jahl*"
 - iii) Religious norms:
 - (1) Bedouin Polytheism
 - (2) Exposure to Monotheism

II) Muhammad's Biography

- a) Sources
 - i) The *Qur'an*—114 "revelations" or *suras* first compiled in mid-7th century
 - ii) *Hadiths*—"deeds" and "sayings" attributed to Muhammad
- b) Family background (570-632)
 - i) "Quraysh of the Inside" vs. "Quraysh of the Outside"
 - ii) Marriage to Khadija
- c) Experience as caravan merchant
 - i) Masterful negotiator and diplomat

III) The Challenge of Muhammad's Message

- a) The Calling—610 C.E.
 - i) Annual family retreat on Mount Hira
 - ii) Gabriel's "harsh treatment of me"
 - iii) Image of Muhammad as an unwitting, **reluctant** messenger of God
 - (1) Immediate fear of being spirit-posessed
 - (2) Crucial role of Khadija in reassuring him
- b) "The Seal of the Prophets"
 - i) Last of the prophets summoned by the Judeo-Christian God
 - ii) **Belated yet decisive** contribution to the monotheistic tradition
 - iii) Islam's acute sense of spiritual and physical "siege mentality"

- c) Challenge to Meccan Oligarchy
 - i) Social reforms
 - ii) Muhammad's insistence on gender equality in faith
 - (1) Men and women equal before God
 - (2) Appealed for harmony within the *umma*, and harmony between men and women
 - (a) New rights for women introduced by Muhammad
 - (b) Example of the prominent role of A'isha as "Mother of the Faithful"
- d) Persecution of Muhammad and his followers
 - i) Protection first from Khadija, then after her death, his uncle Abu Talib
 - ii) Flight to Medina—the Hijra in 622
 - (1) Turning point for Muhammad and his fledgling faith
 - (2) Political authority and religious authority became synonymous
 - iii) Relationship to the Jews of Medina
 - (1) Enlisted their trust and support
 - (2) The Banu Qurayza clan of Arab Jews
 - (3) The change in the *qibla*