

The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam

By: Eric Pement

Founder: Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908) founded the Ahmadiyya (pronounced *aah-mod-EE-yah*) in 1889.

Factions: The Ahmadiyya persist today as two competing factions, named after their headquarters city: the Qadiani group (of Qadian, India) and the Lahori group (of Lahore, Pakistan). Each faction views itself as the true interpreter of Ghulam Ahmad and the others to be misguided.

Sacred Scriptures: The Qur'an

History

Ghulam Ahmad was born February 13, 1835, in Qadian, a city in northern India, near the borders of Pakistan and Kashmir.¹ He is often called “Hazrat Mirza” Ghulam Ahmad. “Hazrat” is a title of respect; “Mirza” is a partly title and partly family name. (Note that the family name is Ghulam, and his given name is Ahmad.) His grandparents had been wealthy, but political struggles between the Sikhs and the British caused the family to lose much of their property. Ahmad was a well-educated Muslim, holding government posts in early adulthood, while engaging Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians in religious debates.

In June 1876, at the age of forty-one, Ahmad received his first verbal revelation: that his father, suffering from dysentery, would die after sunset. The death came to pass, and a second revelation followed, saying that Allah (the Arabic name for God) was sufficient to provide for him.² He began fasting and daily attendance at the mosque, during which he was flooded by a stream of continuous revelations. He began writing in defense of Islam against the Christian missionaries and the Arya Samaj, a militant Hindu missionary organization. In 1880, he published the first volume of apologetics and initially was hailed as a gifted defender of Islam.

Ahmad received new revelations about his calling, which created trouble with the Islamic community. At first, he claimed to be a reformer (Arabic *mujjadid*) of Islam. In March 1889 he founded the Ahmadiyya movement, taking on disciples who would pledge their loyalty and obedience until death.³ The terms *Ahmadiyya* and *Ahmadi* mean “[followers] of Ahmad”; *Ahmad* is both another name for Muhammad and the given name of Ghulam Ahmad.

In 1891 he announced his discovery that Jesus Christ had been crucified, but did not die. Instead, he merely swooned (only appeared to die). The “burial spices” put on Jesus’ body were actually medicines that helped revive him. Jesus appeared to his disciples, who mistook his recovery with a resurrection. Then Jesus traveled to India to preach to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” died at the age of 120 years, and is now buried in mausoleum in Srinagar, Kashmir. The name “Yus Asaf” on the outside of the tomb hides his true identity as Jesus of Nazareth. (Ahmad eventually wrote *Jesus in India* to explain his theory; an English edition appeared in 1944.)

Ahmad’s theory contradicts classical Islam in two ways. First, the Qur’an flatly says Jesus was neither killed “nor crucified” (Sura 4:157) but that Allah “raised him up unto himself” (4:158), taking Jesus directly to heaven. Second, Islamic *hadith* (tradition) teaches that Jesus will one day return from Heaven, declare himself a Muslim, and lead the people of the world in submission to Islam. Ahmad’s theory requires reinterpreting both the Qur’an and the *hadith* on these points (that is, Jesus is dead and buried, not alive in heaven, not returning).

The same year, Ahmad announced that he was the “Promised Messiah and the Mahdi” (a prophetic figure in Islam), and therefore the biblical prophecies about the “return of Christ” were spiritually fulfilled. Soon, Ahmad concluded that he was the fulfillment of every religious hope: the Messiah of the Jews, the Christ of the Christians, the Mahdi of the Muslims, the

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Metteyya Buddha, and an incarnation of Krishna (1904). Many former supporters turned against him.

The late 1890s were beset by controversy. Ahmad challenged Christians and Muslims to “prayer duels” for 40 days to prove who was truly following God. In June 1893, he prophesied that his debate opponent Abdullah Atham would die “within 15 months,” but this prediction failed, even though attempts were made on Atham’s life.⁴ When a long-time opponent from the Arya Samaj was killed, Ahmad claimed it fulfilled prophecy. In 1897 he announced that an outbreak of bubonic plague in the Punjab was judgment on the people for rejecting his mission.⁵

In 1899, Ahmad marketed and sold “the ointment of Jesus” (*marham-i-’Isa*), allegedly the same ointment that brought Jesus back to life and healed him from the crucifixion. He advertised it as a cure for bubonic plague and other ailments and said he prepared it “solely under the influence of divine inspiration.” On October 19, 1899, the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore ordered him to discontinue its sale as a fraudulent product. Ahmad appealed the ruling, but the decision was upheld by the Chief Court of the Punjab on June 8, 1900.⁶

Ahmad died in Lahore on May 26, 1908.⁷ His first disciple, Maluvi Noor-ud-Din, was chosen to lead the movement as a community of believers, until his own death in 1914. At this point, the movement split into two factions.

The larger faction, based in Qadian, was led by Ahmad’s son, Bashir-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad (1889–1965). They interpreted the founder’s role as Messiah, Mahdi, and prophet more literally, and operate as a spiritual community. Today, they are commonly called Qadianis. The Qadianis believe in lineal succession; their leaders must be descendants of Ahmad. The Qadianis almost never mention the existence of their rivals in Lahore.

A much smaller faction consisted of the movement’s intelligentsia, led by Maulana Muhammad Ali (1874–1951). They moved their offices to Lahore, about 70 miles east. Ali produced several widely-distributed scholarly works, including an annotated Arabic/English translation of the Qur’an (4th ed. 1951). The Lahoris are quite open about the differences between them and the Qadianis, and regularly participate in academic and scholarly conferences. They accept Ahmad as a reformer, but say he never seriously claimed to be a prophet.

Common to both factions is their focus on Ahmad as reformer, belief in the “swoon theory” of Jesus’ crucifixion and his subsequent travel to India, and special interest in reaching Christians with their form of apologetics.

Doctrine

From a Christian perspective, the Ahmadiyya is an Islamic sect. They proclaim the Qur’an as the Word of Allah, conveyed without error through the prophet Muhammad. Anything that disagrees with the Qur’an or the practice of Muhammad is deemed false. They gather in mosques and pray five or six times a day toward Mecca.⁸ Conversion occurs through reciting the Islamic confession, and they believe in the five “Pillars of Islam.”

From the perspective of traditional Muslims, the Ahmadiyya is a pseudo-Islamic cult. In fact, most Muslims view the Ahmadiyya the same way evangelical Christians view Mormonism. They believe the Ahmadiyya are heretics, denying essential doctrines of Islam. The Ahmadiyya themselves want to be accepted as true Muslims who have a prophetic founder with additional revelations, restoring the teachings of Islam to their original purity.

Jesus: Like traditional Muslims, Ahmadis deny that Christ was the “Son of God,” that Almighty God can “beget” anything or have a “son” (see Sura 112), and absolutely deny that Jesus was God incarnate or divine. Likewise, they deny that the death of Jesus was predicted in the Bible or is necessary to provide atonement for sin.

The Qadianis admit that, unlike traditional Muslims, their teaching “denies that Jesus could make birds and breathe life into them, which is one of the miracles attributed to Jesus” in Sura 3:49 and 5:110.⁹ The Ahmadiyya movement as whole tends to ascribe Jesus’ miracles and healings to natural causes (e.g., spontaneous remission). Also unlike traditional Muslims, they deny that Jesus was translated to heaven and will one day return, as noted earlier.

On the virgin birth of Christ, the Qadianis believe Mary conceived without any man touching her, but this was “a natural phenomenon,” operating by unknown principles.¹⁰ The

Lahoris assert that one's denial of the virgin birth "does not affect his faith or practice of Islam in any way."¹¹

Ahmad made *very intemperate* claims about Jesus as described in the Bible. He believed the Jesus of the Qur'an was a sinless prophet, but the Jesus of the Bible was an alcoholic, a liar, and a false prophet who had gone insane:

- "Jesus could not portray himself as a pious man because people knew he was a gluttonous alcoholic and these bad habits ... [began] from early age."¹²
- Jesus in the New Testament "had the habit of uttering obscenities and frequently using foul language. ... he had also to some extent the habit of lying."¹³
- "Alas! ... three prophecies of the Messiah proved to be outrightly false!"¹⁴
- The Gospels provide "clear proof that Jesus had actually become insane due to epilepsy."¹⁵

Traditional Muslims find these statements blasphemous. The typical Ahmadiyya member is not aware that their founder said such things. Many of his most offensive statements are available only in Urdu and have never been officially translated into English.

Authority: Ahmad claimed to be a prophet, receiving revelations and visions. However, he lived in a Muslim context where Muhammad was accepted as the "seal of the prophets," so his prophethood must be derived from Muhammad. This is typical: "The Holy Prophet is the seal of prophets, and no other prophet can appear after him, except one who is spiritually his disciple and who receives the gift of prophecy through him."¹⁶ Note that exception clause.

He asserted that God "has told me repeatedly that I am Krishna of the Hindus and the promised Messiah for the Muslims and Christians ... Spiritually, Krishna and the promised Messiah are one and the same person."¹⁷ Ahmad thought he was not merely the Promised Messiah and the Mahdi, but also "an incarnation of Jesus Christ."¹⁸ Moreover, his grandeur "excels [that of] Jesus by a thousand measures."¹⁹

He believed his works were superior to Jesus. "I swear by God, in whose hands my soul is, that if the Messiah, the son of Mary, were my contemporary, he could not have done the works that I can do, and the signs which I am bringing about he could never perform."²⁰

Many of Ahmad's visions are mystical in the extreme. For example, "In a vision I saw that I myself was God and believed myself to be such." Yet he warned his followers against seeing this as pantheism.²¹ To the non-mystic, some of his visions seem quite bizarre: "Indeed, God named me Mary who was pregnant with Jesus. ... I am the only one who has claimed that I am Mary and that into me has been blown the soul of Jesus."²²

Other Muslims: Despite Ahmad's lip service to Muhammad as the "final prophet," his actions belie that claim. He changed Islamic doctrine about Jesus' death, translation to heaven, and second coming; he allegedly had more miracles than Muhammad and Jesus; and he predicted that his movement would decimate Christianity worldwide, which Muhammad clearly could not do.

Muslims who rejected Ahmad were declared unbelievers (*kuffar*). Ahmadi may not pray behind non-Ahmadis or offer funeral prayers for non-Ahmadis. Ahmadi women may not marry non-Ahmadis. These regulations show that Ahmad believed his calling was superior to Muhammad, and his community was separate from the rest of the Muslim world.

Finally, Ahmadiyyas hold that nonbelievers will go to Hell, suffering a finite length of time for the purpose of reformation. "A time will come when Hell will be emptied of all sinners," who will ultimately be embraced by God's mercy.²³

Christian Response

The Qur'an: The Ahmadiyya arguments against Christianity have severe weaknesses, as do those of mainstream Islamic apologetics. Namely, they presuppose the infallibility of the Qur'an and deny the credibility of the Bible whenever the Qur'an addresses events from biblical times, even when the Bible contains firsthand testimony.

It is one thing to use the Qur'an to support an event from the life of Muhammad. It is another thing to use the Qur'an to establish events or teachings from the life of Moses, David, or Jesus. The Old Testament documents are over 1000 years older than the Qur'an. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses and apostles (Matthew, John, Paul, James) or by

people with firsthand contact with eyewitnesses (Mark, Luke). They knew Jesus' family, they knew the first disciples, and they spoke the same language.

The Qur'an was written 600 years after the events it describes, 800 miles from Israel, by someone who did not speak the same language. A book so far removed from the biblical times, location, and direct participation does not have credibility as evidence.

Resurrection: The New Testament clearly states that Christ "died" (Mark 15:44–45, Acts 3:15, Rom. 5:8) and rose "from the dead" on the third day (Acts 10:40–41, 1Cor. 15:3–4, 1Pet. 1:21). Scripture never says he only "appeared" or "seemed" to die. Many times Jesus predicted his death and resurrection—not his injury and recovery (e.g., Mark 8:31, 9:9, 31, 10:34, 45, 12:8, 14:24). Note that if Jesus did not literally die by crucifixion, this makes him a false prophet.

The burial spices for Jesus' body (John 19:39–40, Luke 23:56–24:1) were not an "ointment" for healing his wounds; he was already dead. It was Jewish custom to use spices to mask the smell of decay (see John 19:40, 2 Chron. 16:14).

Note that Ahmad has a vested interest in advocating the swoon theory. If Jesus is literally coming back, Ahmad cannot be the "return of Christ." So Ahmad must see to it that Jesus is dead and buried to give *himself* a place as the Promised Messiah, even if this conjecture relies on the most tenuous evidence.

Considering all that Jesus accomplished in the 3 years he ministered in Galilee and Judea, is it plausible that he could minister for nearly 60 years in India and not leave a functioning church, a phenomenal record of miracles, and inform his apostles and followers worldwide?

Authority: Ahmad's credibility falls on many counts: (1) He made predictions that did not come to pass.²⁴ (2) He contradicts the Bible (and the Qur'an) to suit his own agenda. (3) His prophetic roles do not square with reality—Moses and Jesus were monotheists, but Krishna is an idol of Hindu mythology and Buddha was agnostic. (4) His mystical claims to be God, Jesus incarnate, Mary, Muhammad, and other spiritual leaders borders on mental illness.²⁵ (5) His assertions that Jesus was a false prophet, an alcoholic, a liar, a profane person, and insane are plainly blasphemous. In attacking the Bible to defend the Qur'an, Ahmad shows that he cannot be relied on for sound judgment or fundamental honesty.

Notes

- ¹ A. R. Dard, *Life of Ahmad: Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement* (Tilford, Surrey, U.K.: Islam International Publications, 2d ed. 2008), 33. Ahmad did not know his date of birth, and wrote that he was born "in 1839 or 1840." The date of Feb. 13, 1835, is the result of recent scholarship.
- ² Bashir-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad, *Hazrat Ahmad* (1917; reprinted Silver Spring, MD: Islam International Publications, 4th ed. 1998), 20–21.
- ³ Ghulam Ahmad, *Our Teaching* (Silver Spring, MD: Islam International Publications, 4th ed. 1998), 48.
- ⁴ "Mirza Ghulam Qadiani's predictions on Abdullah Khan Atham," Idara Dawat-o-Irshad, USA, <http://www.irshad.org/qadianism/prophecib.php> (accessed 2010-02-28).
- ⁵ *Review of Religions* editorial staff, *A Short Sketch of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam* (1907; Lagos, Nigeria: Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, 1973), 5.
- ⁶ L. Bevan Jones, *The Ahmadiyya Movement* (London: Fellowship of Faith for the Muslims, [ca. 1945]), 11.
- ⁷ Ghulam Ahmad, *Tadhkirah* (UK: Islam International Publications, 2009), vii.
- ⁸ The five daily prayers are mandatory, and a follower "shall try his/her best to be regular" in a sixth prayer before dawn.
- ⁹ *A Short Sketch*, 33.
- ¹⁰ Mizra Tahir Ahmad, *Christianity: A Journey from Facts to Fiction* (Tilford, Surrey, UK: Islam International Publications, 1994), 7.
- ¹¹ Maulana Hafiz Sher Mohammad, *The Ahmadiyya Case* (Newark,

- CA: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1987), 234.
- ¹² *Roohani Khazain (Satt-Bachan)*, 10:296, as quoted in Syed Rashid Ali, "Jesus (pbuh) in Ahmadiyyat," *Anti Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam*, March 2005, <http://alhafiez.org/rashid/jesus.htm> (accessed 2010-02-27).
- ¹³ *Roohani Khazain (Anjam Aatham)*, 11:289, cited in S. Ali.
- ¹⁴ *Roohani Khazain (Ijaz-e-Ahmadi)*, 19:121, cited in S. Ali.
- ¹⁵ *Roohani Khazain (Satt-Bachan)*, 10:295 footnote, cited in S. Ali.
- ¹⁶ *A Short Sketch*, 32.
- ¹⁷ *The Ahmadiyya Movement*, 2.
- ¹⁸ *A Short Sketch*, 11.
- ¹⁹ *Our Teaching*, 13.
- ²⁰ *Roohani Khazain (Haqiqat-ul-Wahi)*, 22:152, cited in S. Ali.
- ²¹ *Tadhkirah*, 248, 250.
- ²² *Haqiqat-ul-Wahi*, 337, and *Baharin-i-Ahmadiyya*, 388, as cited in "Mirza Ghulam's Tirade against Jesus Christ (pbuh)," Idara Dawat-o-Irshad, USA, <http://www.irshad.org/exposed/tirade2.php> (accessed 2010-02-27).
- ²³ *Our Teaching*, 46.
- ²⁴ See <http://www.irshad.org/exposed/false.php> for a list of failed prophecies.
- ²⁵ The best way to appreciate this is to read large swaths from the *Tadhkirah*, available online at <http://www.alislam.org/books/>. The 22-volume set of *Roohani Khazain* ("Spiritual Treasures"), cited above, is available in PDF format in the Urdu section.



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