

SEEDBED X/2 p.18

References to Hypocrites are fairly numerous in the Qur'an; one complete Sura, number 63 ("*The Hypocrites*") is devoted to them. I found a very informative summary of the qur'anic perspective on Hypocrites in *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an*, by Faruq Sherif [Ithaca Press, 13 Southwark Street, London SE1 1RQ, 1985]. By the way, if you are looking for a good introduction to the teaching of the Qur'an that includes historical background as well, here is one. The author is Muslim. The following is found on pages 87 to 89 of that work.

From the examination of the verses in which the terms 'Munafiq' (approximate translation: hypocrite) and 'Nifaq' (hypocrisy) occur, the following definition can be given for the word 'Munafiq': 'Munafiq' is a person who, in matters of faith, says with his tongue what does not exist in his heart. This statement actually appears in the Qur'an. Verse 161 [167] of Sura III, referring to the behaviour of the hypocrites during the battle of Uhud, says that they said with their lips what was not in their hearts. This description elucidates also another point, namely that 'hypocrisy' is an intermediate condition between belief and unbelief and not (as some commentators have argued) a species of unbelief. There is no hypocrisy in either a believer or an unbeliever. In the case of the former his tongue and his heart are at one in acknowledging God's signs and his apostle; and in the case of the latter his tongue and his heart are at one in rejecting them. The verse cited says that on that day (i.e. on the day of the battle) the hypocrites were nearer to unbelief than they were to belief.

The Qur'an mentions hypocrisy mostly in the context of special historical events or persons. Among such events are the battle of Uhud, the expulsion of the Jews of Bani-Nadhir from Medina, and the attack on the tribe of Bani-Mustaliq. But the term hypocrisy has also been applied to special groups of people. Thus verse 98 [97] of Sura IX refers to the Arab bedouins as specially given to hypocrisy, and a similar statement is made in the same Sura (verse 102 [101]) about the people of Medina.

From the verses of the Qur'an it is evident that the Prophet entertained particularly bitter feelings towards the hypocrites. This is because in matters of vital importance they proved themselves to be false. On occasions when the Prophet led campaigns against his opponents, the hypocrites, while outwardly professing faith, in actual fact behaved in a hostile manner. Not only they did not co-operate; they worked against the Prophet's plans. They avoided participating in the expeditions, and if they did participate, they were the first

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to desert. They cautioned others to stand aloof; they tried to cause disaffection among the believers; they conspired in secret or tried to come to terms with the enemy; they made promises on oath and broke them. No wonder then that the Prophet should have treated them as no different from unbelievers and polytheists. Verses 15-18 of Sura LVIII say: "God has prepared for them a severe penalty; evil indeed are their deeds. They have made their oaths a screen for their misdeeds: thus they obstruct men from the path of God: therefore shall they have a humiliating penalty. Of no profit whatever to them, against God, will be their riches or their sons. They will be companions of the Fire to dwell therein for ever." Verses 102 to 104 [101] of Sura IX say: "Certain of the desert Arabs round about you are hypocrites, as well as among the Medina folk; they are obstinate in hypocrisy...they shall be sent to a grievous penalty." Verse 9 of Sura LXVI, addressing the Prophet, says: "Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites and be firm against them. Their abode is hell". But in verse 104 [103] of Sura IX the Prophet receives this injunction: "Take alms from their goods so as to purify and sanctify them. pray on their behalf, for your prayers are a source of security for them, and God is One who hears and knows."

Hypocrites are again and again referred to in the Qur'an and placed on the same footing as unbelievers. Their characteristics are described, *inter alia*, in Sura IV which was revealed shortly after the battle of Uhud, the battle in which the hypocrites showed their true colours more openly. It is pointed out that they change constantly from one side to another, they try to lead the believers astray, that they aim at deceiving God, but it is God who deceives them, and that if they pray it is only for the sake of ostentation. The whole subject of the hypocrites, namely how they betray themselves, how they should be treated by the believers, and what Allah has in store for them comes up with emphasis in the said Sura. It appears that the conduct of the hypocrites during the battle of Uhud gave rise to a controversy among the Prophet's followers. There were two schools of opinion. One maintained that they should be put to death, while the other was in favour of leaving them alone. The Qur'an decreed a middle course between the two extremes. It laid down that they should not be admitted to the circle of the faithful, that they should be given a chance to set out (fight) in the path of God, but if they turned back they should be put to death wherever found; that if they deserted and took refuge with a tribe with which the Moslems had a pact of non-aggression they should not be molested; that if they came to the believers and declared themselves unwilling to take part in any fighting, while giving guarantees of peace they should be given quarter, but that if they persisted in their ways they should be seized and slain wherever found. (IV. 90 to 93 [88-91]) The fate of the hypocrites in the life to come is to be consigned for ever to hell-fire (verses IV. 139, 144 [138, 140, 145]) unless they repent and mend their ways, becoming wholehearted believers (IV. 145 [146]). But here again one is reminded of the mystery of Allah's plans. "Would you guide those whom Allah has caused to err? He whom Allah has led astray cannot be guided." (IV. 90, 142 [88, 143]).

By way of conclusion I shall simply extract sections from the article by David Shenk.

Ever since Medina, the Muslim community is inclined to develop a fixation on the need to secure the internal integrity of the Muslim community. Hypocrites are not to be tolerated. ... However, the Muslim community is commanded to protect the integrity of other monotheistic communities of faith who exist within its political control. Both Jewish and Christian communities are to become *dhimmi* (protected) communities. These are identifiable faith communities who exist within the suzerainty of Muslim political control.

A serious problem arises, however, when Christians begin to function within the *ummah* with camouflage. When Christians begin to worship or conduct themselves like Muslims, then the boundaries between the two communities which the *dhimmi* system has established become erased. In a region under the political control of Islam, that is intolerable. It feels like sabotage from within. It conjures memories of the Jews in Medina who acted like Muslims but were not really committed to Islam.

[Here, David cites the case of the *Isawa*, a people group in Nigeria who attempted to follow Jesus in their own way as Muslims and were practically annihilated for it, to show the typical consequences of this kind of action. He further illustrates the problem from his own experience in Somalia and Kenya, and concludes:]

My judgment is that it is wise for the church in mission in Muslim settings to function unobtrusively. It is important to attempt to function with a low profile and to work in convergence with the local culture as much as possible. But my judgment is that little is gained and perhaps much is lost when Christians identify with the Muslim community in ways that can easily be interpreted as undermining the internal integrity of the Muslim community. My judgment is that it is much easier for Muslims to tolerate the presence of Christians among them when the definitions of that Christian community are quite clear. This is not to mean that the definitions of the community shall be obnoxious or noncontextual. But the Muslims must be able to know who the followers of Jesus are in distinction to those who seek to walk in the *sunnah* (customary practice) of Mohammed. (From *SEEDBED IX/1* [1994], pages 15 - 16.)

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