



Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam

By Karen Armstrong

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Western relations with the Muslim world are increasingly important to international stability, but, although more can be discovered about Muhammad than about any other founder of a world religion, much of what is known about him originates from prejudiced medieval accounts written at the time of the Crusades. Just as she used events in St Paul's life to examine Christian dilemmas in "The First Christian", here Karen Armstrong draws on events in Muhammad's life to discuss Western problems and prejudices. In considering his dealings with his wives and female converts, she asks whether he and his religion are truly as misogynistic as Westerners tend to believe. She also asks how his extraordinary political success has affected our view of Islam. Christians are used to the spectacle of the crucified Jesus and have sanctified the notion of failure and humiliation. Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, tend to see worldly success as a sign of God's blessing and are suffering peculiar difficulties now in coming to terms with the weakness vis-a-vis the West. The book has been written for general readership, but with the aim of maintaining standards of scholarship, and it offers a view of Muhammad the prophet as a sympathetic man whose exciting life helps one to appreciate the rich complexity of the Muslim tradition. Karen Armstrong's other books include "The Gospel According to Woman" and "Holy War".

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