

“Why Do You Lie About Islam?”

Why do you say lies about Islam? You have to be fair when describing other religions to Christians otherwise you are a liar.

You said that in Islam no one can make relation with God and that's not true. Everyone can make relation with God, moreover the topheads of islamic organizations can't claim they are better than common people cuz it's a pure heart issue in the first place.

You said in Islam God is unknown and that's tricky cuz for sure we know him but we didn't see him,so we know him morally not physically.

You said the prize is after death, and that's the greatest lie, cuz the rule that every Muslim know is, bad relationship with Allah(God)=discomfort in life, good relationship=comfort, contentment, and help of Allah. You said that everyone need forgiveness even Mohammed and that's not true, the truth is that we all need surplus from Allah cuz our good work can't reward blessing of Allah in life let aside the paradise.

You claim that Allah in Islam doesn't love anybody, however he loves the devouts. Is that enough, or you want me to say more?

If you are innocent and said that by mistake then correct it and contact me, if you want to misguide your people, it's up to you and Allah will judge you.

Thank you very much for taking time to read [the article on Islam](#), and especially for writing to us. We appreciate you. And we do honor your request that we be fair in what we say about religions beside Christianity. If there are errors in what we have said, we are certainly open to correction.

As I read your message, I noted the following objections to

the article on Islam:

1. That there is no true relationship with God in Islam.
2. That God is unknown in Islam.
3. That salvation consists in the blessings that come after death, rather than during this life.
4. That everyone is in need of forgiveness, even Muhammed.
5. That God is not described as a loving God in the Koran.

I can understand why some of these statements would be offensive to you. Let me do my best in trying to respond to each of them.

First, that there is no true relationship with God in Islam. In reading over the article, I couldn't find this precise statement. But I did find the statement at the end of the article that "the New Testament . . . reveals the only source of acceptance before God in His love and grace, expressed through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ" This is the clear testimony of the New Testament, and of Jesus Christ himself, and of his apostles. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father (God) but by me" (Gospel of John 14:6). The apostle Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The name he referred to is Jesus Christ. This is a difficult statement to accept, I know. But it is the clear teaching of the New Testament, which also tells us that God is "the rewarder of those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, if we earnestly seek the truth of God, He will reveal it to us. And we believe that truth includes the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning his being the way to a relationship with God.

Second, that God is unknown in Islam. I did find the statement in the article that in the Koran, God is ultimately unknowable. I can understand your reaction to this statement. But it was intended to reflect the orthodox Muslim doctrine of

mukhalafa (difference) and tanzih (removal or making transcendent), which implies that God's essence is not really knowable to us . . . that the attributes or characteristics ascribed to God in the Koran are descriptions of his actions or deeds, but not of his nature or essence. This may not be widely comprehended by Muslim people, but it is a reflection of Islamic teaching. You can consult for reference the book entitled *The Call of the Minaret* by Kenneth Cragg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 42-43.

Third, that the "prize" is after death, and not in this life. I couldn't really find a statement like this in the article. Actually, the New Testament teaches that there are many blessings that flow from our relationship with God through Jesus—both in this life and in the next. But obviously, knowing God does not shield us from ever experiencing pain and sorrow during this life. But it does assure us of the comforting grace and mercy of God, both now and after we die.

Fourth, that everyone needs forgiveness, even Muhammed. I know that among some Muslims, Muhammed is viewed as a nearly perfect man. And he obviously was a very great man. But the Koran itself testifies to his imperfection, and his need to ask forgiveness from God. See the following Koranic texts: 40.55; 41.19; 48.2. According to the the New Testament, all of us stand in need of God's forgiving grace. At one point it says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and at another, "For the wages (penalty) of sin is death (eternal separation from God)" (Romans 6:23). This last text goes on to say, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." In other words, eternal life (which includes forgiveness of our sin, as well as fellowship with God) comes to us as a free gift. At another place the New Testament says, "For by grace are you saved, through faith; and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9). As it says in the Gospel of John, "Yet to all who received him (Jesus Christ), to those who believed in

his name, he (God) gave the right to become children of God" (Gospel of John 1:12).

Fifth, that the Koran does not speak of God as a God of love or as a Father to his people. I know that one of the names of God in the Koran is "Al Wadud" (the Loving, Compassionate one). I believe it is used of God only twice in the Koran (11.90 and 85.14). Yet I think it is clear that this title falls short of the Bible's description in I John 4:8 that "God is love," as well as the many examples of God actually extending his love to sinners. For example, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (I John 4:10). Actually, the great Islamic theologian al-Ghazzali taught that this title for God refers only to his objective acts of kindness or expressions of approval. In his work Al-Maqsad Al-Asna he says, "He (God) remains above the feeling of love" (p. 91) and "Love and mercy are desired in respect of their objects only for the sake of their fruit and benefit and not because of empathy or feeling" (p. 91). In light of this, I would have to stand by the statement in the article that in the Koran God is not spoken of as a God of love or as a Father to his people (a title never attributed to God in the Koran), as He is in the Bible.

Mr. _____, I do appreciate very much your writing to us. My purpose is not at all to offend you personally, but to encourage you to evaluate the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, and to compare them to the teachings of Muhammed in the Koran. My wish and prayer is for God's blessing and grace on your life.

Sincerely,

Richard Rood

“You Mislead People About Jesus and Allah”

Hi—I’m a Muslim from UK. I visited your site and found you to be a misleading person who is blinded by faith most probably passed down the family. You say that Jesus is god then that means that you don’t believe in one god but you believe in two gods, Jesus and his father (god forgive). And if Jesus was god why were the Romans able to overpower him, how can the god who created everything be overpowered by a few measley people?

I hope you do your research thoroughly in the future and look at and review religion with the same eye you look at yours, and if not look at your own religion with the same critical eye you look at others. Please don’t forget your initial duty is the search for truth not the enforcement of your own religion. Please don’t lie in order to achieve a genuine good purpose or you are opposing your own fundamental beliefs.

Hope allah guides to the correct path. Please search for the truth the real truth.

Thank you for writing. I want to honor you for your deep respect and love for God, which is very evident in what you write. I understand why you want to defend your perspective on God.

However, God has revealed certain things about Himself to us that Islam does not accept, but that does not mean they are not true. I share your belief in one God, not two Gods. The idea that God could have three persons and still only be one God is so outrageous it HAS to be a divine idea—how could mere mortals think it up?!

Let me try to explain. Do you believe in water, and steam, and ice? I bet you do. They are all comprised of the H₂O molecule. Do you believe in three different H₂O's? I bet you don't. You probably believe in one H₂O molecule that takes three different forms. This isn't a perfect analogy to God, but it's closer than anything else I can imagine.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is God, the Father is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but they are not each other and they are not three separate Gods. I have no idea how this can be true, but it's what the Bible teaches and it is what Jesus said. Jesus was 100% God, but left heaven to become 100% God AND 100% man at the same time. He wrapped Himself in human flesh and became one of us. The purpose for this was to die for our sins because we cannot possibly overcome the penalty for our sin and make ourselves perfect—and God requires that people be perfect to enter heaven.

The Romans did not overpower Him: He allowed them to take Him because that was the divine plan from before creation. There is a huge difference. Even when He was on the cross, He said that if He wanted, He could call a legion of angels to come take Him off but that wasn't the plan, so He didn't.

I assure you I have done my research. I tell you, most respectfully, that it is Islam that has gotten off the path of truth. Muhammad listened to Christians and to Jews but chose to believe only what he wanted to believe about Jesus and about what the Bible says. The Bible says that Jesus is fully God and fully man, but Islam says that is a lie. Jesus said He would die for our sins and then come back to life in three days—and He did. He is alive today. Where is Muhammad? He is dead. Jesus is far more than just a prophet; He is actually God.

I pray that God will allow you to see that this is true. Why don't you ask Him? Ask the one true God if it's true that Jesus is God. If you have the courage, I challenge you to read

the story of a faithful Muslim who discovered this truth about Jesus: www.answering-islam.org/Testimonies/athanasios.html

God bless you, and lead you into all truth.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You’re Mistaken About Islam”

Hi there Sue,

I was sent a copy of your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#). Having studied most of them in school years ago, and then in seminary, I had a pretty good knowledge of things, but as with many things, I haven’t really thought about the Hindus or the Buddhists for some 30 years! While you read this note, keep in mind that I am a born-again Christian, who lives in Spain, works in Spain and Morocco and is professionally dedicated to translating texts (English/Spanish and a long list of etc.) so I do know a bit about languages.

I found the Moslem part interesting, but I do disagree about a thing or two. One must consider two things before getting into Islam...its founder married a rich widow, so by the time he was 20, he was married, and had no need to work (unlike us and the rest of humanity at that time), so he dedicated his time to meditation and searching...for God I would imagine. He entered into contact with Judaism, and with the early years of Christianity. Therefore, when you start looking at the Koran and the Moslem faith, there are many, many things that are taken out of Judaism...no pork, no shellfish, and a long list of etc, etc. When you see them praying, they use a string of beads just like a rosary! And there are also many, many

aspects that are from the early Christian faith. (Remember that the first Christians were much more Jewish in their thinking that most of us could ever be!)

As I said at the beginning, my work is 100% dedication to translation and there is a clear translation problem with Allah/God when it comes to Islam. The word God for us who speak English is fine, but if you speak Spanish, the word is Dios, and if you speak Arabic, it is Allah (when written in English format, and if it is in the Spanish format, it is Al). Saying that the Moslems do not believe in the same God as us Christians do is totally mistaken. The whole problem stems from a translation error. In Spain, most of the "modern" Moslems, when they say their prayers in Spanish, they use the word "Dios", and not the word "Al." Today, when it comes to translating, it is considered correct to not translate proper nouns in a text, therefore, when the Koran was translated into English, you translated everything, and the Arabic word Allah was made to sound English and therefore considered to be another god. (To give you another example...I live in Seville in southern Spain, but here in Seville, the name of the city is Sevilla, and most people want the city to be called Sevilla, and not Seville. Does this mean that Seville is one city and Sevilla is another? No, of course not) This is the same problem with God and Allah. How many born again Christians use the word Jehovah to describe the God of Abraham? Does that mean they are two different Gods? Of course not. Is the God of the Old Testament different from the God of the New? One again, of course not!

If you consider for a moment that Allah is not Yav nor God, then you are pulling the rug out from under the feet of the many missionaries who have spent years trying to take Christianity to the Moslems.

After being raised in the US in an active, church-going Christian family, and having lived abroad for 30 years, I have discovered that the western version of Christianity has become

altered over the centuries to adapt to cultural implications of various nations. Our beliefs have incorporated heathen beliefs and customs, which are accepted, but are about as far from the truth as can possible be! (sorry about so many examples) We exchange presents at Christmas, and have a tree and the like, including Santa Claus, who was a saint. Where did it all come from?? First of all, Christ was not born on December 25. Based on the Bible description, and knowing weather conditions in the Mediterranean, I am sure that it was more like March or April, and according to my studies, historically, the Wiseman visited Christ about July, so really, the best time of the year to have Christmas would be July, but change the business world on that point! Then, we have a tree...that all comes from the pre-Christian beliefs in northern Europe and England...the druids used to think that the (oak) trees died in winter because the gods left, so they decorated them to get the gods to come back...and they did, in Spring! Over the years, pine trees were decorated, and then people started bringing them into their houses, and the like. If you get down to the bottom line, then if you want to really celebrate Christ's birthday, then we'll have to throw out the heathen tree! The celebration in December 25...it is only 4 days later than the celebration of the coming of winter, a heathen practice in Stonage (UK). Personally, I would rather celebrate Christmas and gift giving in July, with no strings attached, but then business is business!!

Thank you so much for taking the time to send such a thoughtful and educational letter! You have obviously gained a great deal of perspective in your time in Europe, and I appreciate all the things you've shared with me.

I would like to address your comment "Saying that the Moslems do not believe in the same God as us Christians do is totally mistaken." If you re-read my reasons for this statement, they have nothing to do with the word for God in English and Arabic, and everything to do with the character of Allah and

of the God of the Bible. Because the article was written as a time-constrained radio transcript (aimed at a Christian audience), I was limited in what I could say. A strong case can certainly be made for the perspective that Muslims and Christians differ in our understanding of how God is revealed in the Bible and the Qur'an. I suppose it's something like the old story of the three blind men encountering different parts of an elephant: one felt its tail and said the animal was like a rope, the second felt its trunk and said it was like a tree, and the third felt its hide and said it was like a house. I do believe that because the Bible is inspired and the Qur'an is not, we can trust what the Bible says and must see the Qur'an as a man-made book that, as you point out, borrows from both Judaism and Christianity. Thus, one view of God is correct and the other, while containing some truth about God, is incomplete and incorrect.

You mention the work of Christians trying to evangelize Muslims (an amazing task!). I see a parallel between their calling and Paul's sermon at the Areopagus, where he invoked the unknown god the Greeks worshipped and suggested that he could identify that unknown god for them, taking them from what they already knew to unfamiliar theological territory.

It's always hard, when we're trying to fit a large subject into a short amount of time, to strike the right balance between simplicity and accuracy. To be honest, my statement about Allah not being the same as the God of the Bible was directed at the well-meaning people who mistakenly believe "we all worship the same God with different names: God, Allah, Brahman, Buddha. . ." Certainly, Islam and Christianity have many points of similarity, particularly in terms of the fact they are both monotheistic, but there are too many Christians who don't understand the huge and significant differences.

I really appreciated your comments about the cultural aspects of Christianity. I think it's a challenge to Christians in every culture, in every time in history: to stick to Biblical

Christianity and leave out what is cultural. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 4:6, "Do not go beyond what is written." A lot of people equate American (or Western) Christianity with Biblical Christianity, and they're not the same! You gave the excellent example of how we celebrate Christmas, by using imported pagan symbols and dates. I have also seen a difference in the way many American Christians view the use of alcohol compared to European Christians, and when one culture's taboos are imposed on another, misunderstandings occur and opportunities for bridge-building can be lost.

Thanks for sharing your thoughts with me.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Is Islam a Religion of Peace or of Violence?"

I'm hearing people (like the president) say that Islam is actually a religion of peace. Others are warning us that the terrorists who attacked the U.S. on 9/11 represent the true Islam of anger and violence. Which is it? And why would they want to attack us anyway?

To get a better grasp on this apparent contradiction I had a very enlightening conversation with a missionary to Muslims for many years who also has a Ph.D. in Islamics. He provided perspective I have never heard:

We have to back up to 610 A.D. and look at the big picture of Muhammad and the Qur'an.

Muhammad was frustrated at the heathen polytheism of the

Arabian culture, and wanted people to return to the one true God, the God of the Bible. In fact, he called Jews and Christians "the people of the Book." In the beginning, he said he was preaching the same message, just in a different language. And if people had doubts about what he was saying, they should check with the people of the Book.

The Qur'an, which is a compilation of the teachings of Muhammad after his death, is not in chronological order. When Islamic scholars rearrange the chapters, or suras, into chronological order, they are comprised of the Mecca (early, middle and late) suras, the city where Muhammad started out, and the Medina suras, where he ended up. Something very important happened in between those two sections. As Muhammad rose in prominence and influence, accumulating followers, some of them wanted to verify that he was actually a prophet of God. He said, "Go check with the Jewish tribes." So they did. . . and the Jews said, "No, Muhammad is not a prophet of God." This made him very angry, and it changed the way he thought about Jews. The anti-semitism of Islam began here. The hostility, violence, controlling nature, and forceful missionary zeal of Islam ("accept Islam or suffer") developed in Muhammad's later teachings.

So there are two very different aspects to Islam. Earlier suras are more about peace. Later suras are more about violence. In addition, where Muslims are in the minority (such as North America and Europe), they tend to follow the earlier Mecca suras. Where they are in the majority (such as the middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.), they tend to follow the later Medina suras.

Add to this the fact that in the culture of Islam, people learn differently. We are taught to think critically, to analyze and compare and contrast literature. Muslims are taught NOT to think critically, only to memorize the Qur'an and parrot back what they are taught about Islam. So it is not surprising to learn that some Muslims say that Islam is a

religion of peace, since that is their perception and experience, and other Muslims say that Islam is a religion of conquering and judgment, since that is their perception and experience.

The Qur'an contradicts itself from the early Mecca suras to the Medina suras. This is different from the progressive revelation we find in the Bible, where God reveals more and more information as history unfolds, and He reveals what had earlier been mysteries. This makes sense in view of the fact that the Qur'an is a human invention and the Bible is divinely inspired.

I also asked the missionary why Osama bin Laden wanted to attack us. He suggested three reasons:

- A personal grudge against the U.S. for pressuring Sudan and Saudi Arabia (bin Laden's home country) to kick him out.
- A resentment of America that he shares with many Muslims for exporting our immoral standards and examples to the world through TV, movies and music. They object to the way sexual immorality and impurity, women's provocative dress, pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, and homosexuality are presented as normal, desirable lifestyles. (And I have to say this is a completely legitimate complaint, although their way of showing frustration and displeasure is completely unacceptable!)
- The whole Palestinian-Israeli land fight. In the Arab mindset, the sons of Ishmael (Abraham's son) had the rights to the promised land, and they held it for thousands of years. Then when Israel (sons of Isaac, Abraham's other son) came and took it away from them, that was heinously unfair, but the U.S. backed and supported Israel. What looks like righting a wrong to Israel is "wronging a right" to the Palestinians. This is an impossible situation that cannot be solved until the Lord Jesus returns and HE makes all things

right.

One final comment which Pat asked me to be sure and stress: it is just as illogical to judge all Muslims as terrorists as it is for the rest of the world to condemn all American Christians as Timothy McVeighs.

This is a very complex situation and won't be solved easily or quickly. It shows the importance of worldview and the truth that ideas have consequences.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You Have Many Inaccuracies in Your Article on Islam”

Dear Rick Rood,

I stumbled upon your [“What is Islam”](#) article and read it thoroughly. I would like to know how you got that information because it is inaccurate. I would just like to point them out to you so that you may correct them.

“He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities.”

Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means “God” in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

“At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it’s important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system.”

Correction: Islam is a pure monotheistic religion. The message of Islam is that ‘There is no God, but God.’ How is it not? Please elaborate.

“The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power.”

Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah’s names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

“Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him.”

Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims appear to come close worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

“Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so.”

Why is that?

“But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin.”

What kinds? For example?

"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!"

You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle," but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, and to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.

There are MANY other mistakes that you have written about Islam. Not to mention that it sounds very bigoted. Please fix your mistakes. Thanks!

Thanks for your letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. However, I'm afraid that you may have misunderstood certain aspects of Rick's article. Please allow me to try to briefly clarify.

"He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities." Correction: Allah is not the chief god of the Arabs pantheon of dieties. Allah means "God" in Arabic. You are confusing the reader by associating Allah with other Arab deities as for example Zeus is the chief god in the Romans.

Any good history of the Arab peoples that documents the religious climate immediately preceding the time of Muhammad will confirm that there was indeed a pantheon of deities. Muhammad instituted monotheism in place of a prior Arabic

polytheism.

"At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. " Correction: Islam is a pure montheistic religion. The message of Islam is that 'There is no God, but God.'" How is it not? Please elaborate.

Mr. Rood uses the term "monolithic" – not "monotheistic." I believe that you simply misread him at this point. Islam is certainly monotheistic. He documents what he means by it not being monolithic in his article.

"The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power." Correction: Muslims do not believe that Allah's names hold magical powers. There are 99 names which is mentioned in the Quran (not Koran), for example: The Most Merciful, The Protector, The Creator, The All-Knowing, The Loving. These names identify the characteristics of God.

Your third point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, many Muslims hold to what some scholars call "folk Islam". This sort of Islam, often influenced by animism, does often regard these names as having magical power. Similar aberrant beliefs can be found in Judaism, Christianity, and most other world religions. Finally, sometimes Sufi mysticism can tend in this direction as well.

"Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him." Correction: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always recognized that he was a human being. He was a human, and he made mistakes just like the other prophets who are human beings. It is very judgmental for you to add that Muslims appear to come close

worshipping him when that is not the case at all. Muslims only worship God, and only God.

Again, your point is well-taken, provided we are speaking of theologically educated Muslims. However, as I mentioned above, some Muslims would come awfully close to worshiping Muhammad, just as some Roman Catholics come awfully close to worshiping the virgin Mary, even though church doctrine does not include Mary worship. I'm not saying this is what orthodox Islam teaches, it's simply what sometimes happens in practice.

"Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so." Why is that?

Do you not believe that all things are dictated by the sovereign will of Allah? Does anything happen that is not willed by God? If you reject this doctrine, I think you would be taking a minority view within Islam.

"But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin." What kinds? For example?

Casting stones at a stone pillar representing Satan. This was done by Arab pagans prior to the time of Muhammad.

"A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!" You got the part right about how the Jihad means "struggle," but you got the rest of it completely false. It is a struggle to attain nearness to God, by struggling to overcome your bad desires, and to stick to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution and other problems.

As for Jihad, it has historically been understood by most Muslims (and still is today) as Holy War. It can be interpreted, as you say, to mean striving in the cause of Allah to live a pure and righteous life. But many passages in the Quran resist this interpretation (e.g. Suras 4:74-75; 9:5, 14, 29; 47:4; 61:4; etc.).

The New Encyclopedia of Islam (Altamira Press, rev. ed. 2001) documents many of these points.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

The Clash of Civilizations

Introduction

In the summer of 1993, Samuel Huntington published an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the journal *Foreign Affairs*. The article generated more controversy than any other article in the journal since the 1940s. And Huntington says it stirred up more debate than anything else he wrote during that time.

Three years later Samuel Huntington published a book using a similar title. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* came on the market in 1996 and became a bestseller, once again stirring controversy. Given the events of the last year, it seems worthy to revisit his comments and predictions, since in many ways he seems as accurate as an Old Testament prophet.

His thesis is fairly simple. In the future, world history will

be marked by conflicts between three principal groups: western universalism, Muslim militancy, and Chinese assertion.

Huntington says that in the post-Cold War world, “global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational.”[\[1\]](#) During most of human history, major civilizations were separated from one another and contact was intermittent or nonexistent. That pattern changed in the modern era (around 1500 A.D.). For over 400 years, the nation states of the West (Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Germany, and the United States) constituted a multipolar international system that interacted, competed, and fought wars with each other. During that same period of time, these nations also expanded, conquered, and colonized nearly every other civilization.

During the Cold War, global politics became bipolar, and the world was divided into three parts. Western democracies led by the United States engaged in ideological, political, economic, and even military competition with communist countries led by the Soviet Union. Much of this conflict occurred in the Third World outside these two camps and was composed mostly of nonaligned nations.

Huntington argues that in the post-Cold War world, the principal actors are still the nation states, but they are influenced by more than just power and wealth. Other factors like cultural preferences, commonalities, and differences are also influential. The most important groupings are not the three blocs of the Cold War, but rather the major world civilizations.

To put it simply, the line has moved. For 45 years, the Iron Curtain was the central dividing line in Europe. “That line has moved several hundred miles east. It is now the line separating the peoples of western Christianity, on the one hand, from Muslims and Orthodox peoples on the other.”[\[2\]](#)

So in this article we are going to describe and analyze Samuel

Huntington's worldview of global politics in order to understand better the profound changes taking place in the 21st century.

Worldviews of Global Politics

In essence, Huntington is proposing a new worldview in the area of foreign policy. He argues that "worldviews and causal theories are indispensable guides to international politics."[\[3\]](#)

Huntington says that the post-Cold war world is a different world with a different set of issues and conflicts. "In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between people belonging to different cultural entities."[\[4\]](#) World history, he believes, will be marked by conflicts between three principal groups already mentioned: western universalism, Muslim militancy, and Chinese assertion.

Huntington's worldview stands in contrast to four other prominent perspectives that have been proposed to understand global politics. The view of Francis Fukuyama sees world events culminating in what he calls "the end of history." He believes that we may be witnessing the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the acceptance of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. Although first proposed at the end of the Cold War when a harmonious globalism seemed likely, there is little evidence that the war of ideas and ideologies is coming to an end as the events of the last year clearly demonstrate.

A second view is one of *us versus them*. "People are always tempted to divide people into us and them, the in-group and the other, our civilization and those barbarians. Scholars have analyzed the world in terms of the Orient and the Occident, North and South, center and periphery. Muslims have

traditionally divided the world into *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar a-Harb*, the abode of peace and the abode of war.”[\[5\]](#)

A third perspective could be called “184 states, more or less.” According to this view, nation states are the primary (even the sole) actors on the world stage. Each state seeks power and wealth in the midst of anarchy. And while this is a somewhat accurate view of the world, it does not provide any model for understanding global politics.

A fourth and final view is one of chaos. This perspective is illustrated by the book titles “Out of Control” by Zbigniew Brzezinski and “Pandaemonium” by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Recent history is replete with examples of the breakup of states, the loss of governmental authority, and numerous regional conflicts. But, as a model, this view provides little predictive value and also does not completely match reality. The world stage may be full of chaos but its not totally without order and direction.

Samuel Huntington’s worldview, I believe, provides a better perspective on the world of the 21st century.

Major Contemporary Civilizations

Let’s dedicate our attention to what separates these civilizations. The first is the Chinese civilization which dates back to at least 1500 B.C. He describes this as a Sinic civilization in order to describe not only China and Chinese civilization, but also the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and related cultures of Vietnam and Korea.

The second is Japanese to separate it from the Chinese culture. Most scholars recognize it as a separate entity that was an offspring of China, emerging between 100 and 400 A.D.

The third civilization is Hindu, which has existed on the Subcontinent since at least 1500 B.C. This is also referred to as Indian, Indic, or Hindu. One scholar says that Hindu is

“more than a religion or a social system; it is the core of Indian civilization.”[\[6\]](#)

The fourth is a distinct Islamic civilization which originated in the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century A.D. Islam rapidly spread across North Africa and the Iberian peninsula and also eastward into central Asia, the Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia.

A fifth civilization is a separate Orthodox civilization, centered in Russia and separate from western Christendom as a result of its Byzantine parentage. It also has limited exposure to the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and other central western experiences.

Western civilization would be a sixth entity dated as emerging about 700-800 A.D. Scholars generally view it as having three major components (Europe, North America, and Latin America).

A seventh civilization would be Latin America, which has a distinct identity even though it emanates from the West. It has had a corporatist, authoritarian culture and has been primarily Catholic.

Two other civilizations could be added to this list. These would be an African civilization in the south of the continent. The north and east coasts belong to Islamic civilization, but some scholars recognize a distinct African culture on the rest of the continent.

Also, a Buddhist culture could be defined. Although it did not survive in the country of its birth, it has been exported to other countries and regions in the East.

Samuel Huntington argues that in this post-Cold War world, people will identify themselves in terms of their ancestry and heritage. Ultimately they define themselves according to their civilization.

Culture and Civilizations

Samuel Huntington argues that in this new era as people identify themselves in terms of their ancestry and heritage, it will create a clash of civilizations. He says, "In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face, who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and at the broadest level, civilizations." [\[7\]](#)

This is not surprising. We all tend to identify ourselves according to our culture, which includes our political, cultural, and religious heritage. In previous centuries, the major world civilizations were separated from each other. Contact was either non-existent or intermittent. Our global society has put us in contact with each other in ways never before experienced in our history. Cultural differences, therefore, should have a profound effect on how we interact.

Samuel Huntington says, "In the post-Cold War world, culture is both a divisive and unifying force. People separated by ideology but united by culture come together, as the two Germanys did and as the two Koreas and the several Chinas are beginning to. Societies united by ideology or historical circumstance but divided by civilization either come apart, as did the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Bosnia, or are subjected to intense strain, as is the case with Ukraine, Nigeria, Sudan, India, Sri Lanka, and many others." [\[8\]](#)

We should note that cultures and civilizations are not static but do change and evolve. And nations rise and fall. Most go

through somewhat predictable stages and respond to challenges and opportunities.

Nation states will still remain important actors in global politics, but their interests and conflicts will become increasingly shaped by cultural forces and interactions between the major contemporary civilizations.

Samuel Huntington provides a compelling worldview for understanding the future of global politics as well as understanding the philosophical and spiritual interaction and conflict between Christianity and Islam. I believe that Christians need to begin to understand the implications of this major shift in countries and civilizations as we move into the 21st century.

Implications for Christians

The implications of this perspective on missions is profound. In the past, countries that were closed to the gospel tended to be communist countries. Even so, there was still a significant amount of Christian growth in countries behind the Iron Curtain and Bamboo Curtain. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of these countries are more open to the gospel than ever before. Meanwhile, persecution of Christians remains in China.

But a new phenomenon has emerged. Muslim countries are now the most resistant to the message of Christianity. Mission work is limited or even non-existent in many of these Muslim countries. This, I believe, represents the greatest challenge for missions in the 21st century: reaching the Muslim world for Christ. Already there are a billion Muslims in the world, making Islam the second largest religion in the world and one of the fastest growing.

A second implication is related to the first. Samuel Huntington predicts a growing conflict between western

universalism and Muslim militancy. In other words, the conflict is between liberal western democracies and their cultures and Muslim countries.

This presents a major challenge for Christians trying to reach Muslims. When they see the West with its immorality and decadence, they reject it and Christianity. After all, they reason, these are Christian countries and this is what they produce.

As Christians, I believe it is crucial that we make a distinction between Christianity and western society. The political conflict may be between western democracies and Muslim militancy, but the spiritual battle is between Christianity and Islam. The two are not the same.

I have found it helpful to agree with Muslims about many of these criticisms of western culture. It is disarming, and also provides an opportunity to explain that many western countries (especially in Europe) are anything but Christian countries. Instead, I choose to focus the discussion on the Bible and Jesus Christ as a contrast to the Koran and Muhammed.

Whether we are missionaries overseas or missionaries in our backyard, we need to begin to understand the nature of Islam and bring the message of the gospel to the Muslims we meet. I believe Samuel Huntington is correct in his analysis, and we should begin to understand the changing world around us so that we can be more effective for Christ. I hope that this article and the other materials on the Probe Web Site will be helpful to you in that regard.

Notes

1. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 21.

2. Ibid., 28
 3. Ibid., 30
 4. Ibid., 28
 5. Ibid., 32
 6. Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 226.
 7. Huntington, 21.
 8. Ibid., 28.
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Islam and the Sword

Don Closson provides a consideration of the role that violence has played in both historical and contemporary Islam.

On September 11, 2001 Americans found themselves confronted by an enemy they knew little about. We had suddenly lost more lives to a sneak attack than had been lost in the attack on Pearl Harbor and yet few understood the reasons for the hatred that prompted the destruction of the World Trade Center towers and part of the Pentagon. Even in the days that followed, Americans were getting mixed signals from the media and from national politicians. One voice focused on the peaceful nature of Islam, going so far as to argue that Osama bin Laden could not be a faithful Muslim and commit the acts attributed to him. Others warned that bin Laden has a considerable following in the Muslim world and that even if he was removed as a potential threat many would step in to replace him with equal or greater fervor.

Some argued that fundamentalist Muslims are no different than fundamentalist believers of any religion. The problem is not Islam, but religious belief of any type when taken too seriously. This view holds that all forms of religious belief, Christian, Jewish, or Islamic can promote terrorism. Robert Wright, a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania writes that:

If Osama Bin Laden were a Christian, and he still wanted to destroy the World Trade Center, he would cite Jesus' rampage against the money-changers. If he didn't want to destroy the World Trade Center, he could stress the Sermon on the Mount.[{1}](#)

His view is that terrorism can be justified by any religion when people are economically depressed. He adds "there is no timeless, immutable essence of Islam, rooted in the Quran, that condemns it to a medieval morality."[{2}](#)

This claim points to the question: Is there something inherent in Islam that makes it more likely to resort to violence than other world religions like Christianity or Buddhism? While it is important to admit that all religions and ideologies have adherents that are willing to use violence to achieve what they believe are justified ends, it does not follow that all religions and ideologies teach equally the legitimacy of violent means.

People have committed horrible atrocities in the name of Jesus Christ, from the inquisitions to the slaying of abortionists. However, it is my position that it is not possible to justify these actions from the teachings of Christ Himself. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus teach that one should kill for the sake of the Gospel, the Kingdom of God, or to defend the honor of Jesus Himself.

What about Islam? My contention is that Islam's founder Muhammad, and the Qur'an, its holy book, condone violence as a

legitimate tool for furthering Allah's goals. And that those who use violence in the name of Allah are following a tradition that began with the very birth of Islam.

Muhammad

As mentioned earlier, there are followers in most of the world's belief systems that justify the use of violence to achieve their religious or political goals. However, this says more about the sinfulness of humanity than it does about the belief system itself. It is important to look past the individual behavior of a few followers to the message and actions of the founder of each system and his or her closest disciples. In the case of Islam, this means Muhammad and the leadership of Islam after Muhammad's death.

One cannot overstate the centrality of Muhammad's example within the religion of Islam. One of the greatest Muslim theologians, al- Ghazzali, writes of Muhammad:

Know that the key to happiness is to follow the sunna [Muhammad's actions] and to imitate the Messenger of God in all his coming and going, his movement and rest, in his way of eating, his attitude, his sleep and his talk . . . God has said: "What the messenger has brought—accept it, and what he has prohibited—refrain from it!" (59:7). That means, you have to sit while putting on trousers, and to stand when winding a turban, and to begin with the right foot when putting on shoes.{3}

Although considered only human, one Muslim writer describes Muhammad as "[T]he best model for man in piety and perfection. He is a living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue. . . ."{4} So it is important to note that Muhammad believed that violence is a natural part of Islam. Many passages of the Quran, which came from Muhammad's lips support violence. Followers are told

to “fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them (9:5),” and to “Fight those who believe not in God, nor the Last Day.” (9:29) Muhammad also promises paradise for those who die in battle for Allah, “Those who left their homes . . . or fought or been slain,—Verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath;—A reward from the Presence of God.” (3:195; cf. 2:244; 4:95)

While living in Medina, having escaped from persecution in Mecca, Muhammad supported himself and his group of followers by raiding Meccan caravans. His fame grew after a stunning defeat of a large, well-defended caravan at Badr. Muhammad was also willing to have assassinated those who merely ridiculed his prophetic claims. The list of those killed included Jews, old men and women, slaves, and a mother of five children who was killed while she slept.[\[5\]](#) Also, in order to violate a long-standing ban against warfare during a sacred month, he claimed a new revelation that gave him permission to kill his enemies.[\[6\]](#)

Violent expediency seems to have been the guiding rule of Muhammad’s ethics.

Early Islam

Muhammad’s life as a prophet was a precarious one. After fleeing Mecca and establishing himself in Medina, Muhammad was constantly being tested militarily by those who considered him a religious and political threat. Although at an initial disadvantage, Muhammad wore down his opponents by raiding their caravans, seizing valuable property, taking hostages and disrupting the all-important economic trade Mecca enjoyed with the surrounding area.[\[7\]](#) The turning point for Muhammad and his followers seems to have come in what is known as the Battle of the Ditch or the Siege of Medina. A large Meccan force failed to take the city and destroy the new religion.

Suspecting that a local Jewish tribe had plotted with the Meccans to destroy him, Muhammad had all the men of the tribe killed and the women and children sold into slavery.^{8} In A.D. 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca with a large force and took it with little bloodshed. He rewarded many of its leaders financially for surrendering and within a short period of time a large number of the surrounding tribes came over to this new and powerful religious and political movement.

Muhammad continued building his following by using a combination of material enticements, his religious message, and force when necessary. With the fall of Mecca, many other tribes realized Muhammad's position as the most powerful political leader in western Arabia and sent representatives to negotiate agreements with him.

Muhammad's death in 632, just two years after his triumphant return to Mecca, thrust an important decision on the community of believers. Should they choose one person to lead in Muhammad's place or do they separate into many communities. The decision was made to pick Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law and early supporter to assume the role of caliph or successor to Muhammad. Immediately, many who had submitted to Muhammad refused to do so to Abu Bakr. Several tribes wanted political independence, some sought to break religiously as well. The result is known as the Apostasy wars. At the end of two years of fighting to put down both religious and political threats, Abu Bakr had extended his control to include the entire Arabian Peninsula. Islam was now in position to extend its influence beyond Arabia with a large standing army of believers.

Violence and warfare seems to have dominated early Islam. Two of the first four caliphs were assassinated by internal rivals, and within the first fifty years of its existence Islam experienced two bloody civil wars. Rival tribal loyalties within and the religious struggle or jihad against the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires made the first century of

Islam a bloody one.

Jihad

Historian Paul Johnson writes,

[T]he history of Islam has essentially been a history of conquest and re-conquest. The 7th-century “breakout” of Islam from Arabia was followed by the rapid conquest of North Africa, the invasion and virtual conquest of Spain, and a thrust into France that carried the crescent to the gates of Paris.[{9}](#)

From the beginning, Muslims “saw their mission as jihad, or militant effort to combat evil and to spread Muhammad’s message of monotheism and righteousness far and wide.”[{10}](#) Although many Muslims in America have argued that jihad primarily refers to a struggle or striving for personal righteousness, Bernard Lewis, professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University writes that, “The more common interpretation, and that of the overwhelming majority of the classical jurists and commentators, presents jihad as armed struggle for Islam against infidels and apostates.”[{11}](#)

Although highly regulated by Islamic law, the call for every able-bodied Muslim to defend Islam began with Muhammad and has continued with the fatwas of Osama bin Laden in 1996 and 1998. Bin Laden argues that his attacks on American civilians and military personnel conform to Islamic law because America is acting as an imperialistic aggressor against Islam. He has three specific complaints: America has placed infidel troops on holy soil in Saudi Arabia; America has caused the death of over a million Iraqi children since Desert Storm; and American support for the evil Zionist nation of Israel.

Regarding the history of jihad in Islam, an ex-chief justice of Saudi Arabia has written “[A]t first ‘the fighting’ was forbidden, then it was permitted and after that it was made

obligatory, . . .” Muslims are to fight against those who oppress Islam and who worship others along with Allah.{12} He adds that even though fighting is disliked by the human soul, Allah has made ready an immense reward beyond imagination for those who obey. He also quotes Islamic tradition, which says, “Paradise has one hundred grades which Allah has reserved for the Mujahidin who fight in His Cause.”{13}

Numerous passages in the Qur’an refer to Allah’s use of violence. A surah titled “The Spoils of War” states, “O Prophet! Rouse the Believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you . . . they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding.”{14} Another says, “O ye who believe! When ye meet the Unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them. . . .”{15} It adds that those who do will find themselves in hell, a significant incentive to fight on.

Muslims and Modernity

Islam was born in the midst of persecution and eventually conquest. Muhammad was adept at both religious and military leadership, but what about modern Islam? Do all Muslims see jihad in the light of conquest and warfare?

While it is probably safe to say that American born Muslims apply the teachings of Muhammad and Islamic traditions differently than Saudi or Iranian Muslims. The use of violence in the propagation of Islam enjoys wide support. Part of the reason is that the concept of separation of church and state is alien to Islam. Muhammad Iqbal, architect of Pakistan’s split from Hindu India, wrote, “The truth is that Islam is not a church. It is a state conceived as a contractual organism. . . .”{16} Responding to the inability of Islam to accommodate the modern world, an Algerian Islamic activist points to the example of Muhammad:

The Prophet himself did not opt to live far away from the camp of men. He did not say to youth: "Sell what you have and follow me. . . ." At Medina, he was not content merely to be the preacher of the new faith: he became also the leader of the new city, where he organized the religious, social and economic life. . . . Later, carrying arms, he put himself at the head of his troops.{17}

The powerful combination within Islam of immediate paradise for those who die while fighting for Allah and the unity of political, religious, and economic structures, helps us to understand the source of suicide bombers and children who dream of becoming one. Young Palestinians are lining up by the hundreds in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to volunteer for suicide missions. Eyad Sarraj, the director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Project, detects a widespread zeal. "If they are turned down they become depressed. They feel they have been deprived of the ultimate award of dying for God." {18} Palestinian support for suicide bombers is now at 70 to 80 percent.

Islam and Christianity both require its followers to sacrifice and turn from the world and self. Yet while Islam equates political conquest with the furtherance of Allah's reign, Jesus taught that we render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. Christianity recognizes that the advancement of God's kingdom is not necessarily a political one. The New Testament did not advocate the overthrow of the Roman Empire. Muslims are given the example of Muhammad's personal sacrifice in battle so that Allah's enemies might be defeated. Christians are given the example of Christ who gave His life as a sacrifice, so that even His enemies might believe and have eternal life.

Notes

1. Robert Wright, www.msnbc.com/news, 10/30/2001.
2. Ibid.

3. Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), p 82.
4. Ibid., 84.
5. Ibid., 175.
6. The Quran states, "They ask thee Concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. Say: 'Fighting therein is a grave (offense)'; But graver is it In the sight of God To prevent access to the path of God." (2:217)
7. John Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), p 10.
8. Geisler & Saleeb, p 79.
9. Paul Johnson, *National Review*, October 15, 2001.
10. John Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, p 13.
11. Bernard Lewis, "Jihad vs. Crusade," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 2001.
12. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Muhammad Bin Humaid, "Jihad in the Qur'an and Sunnah," <http://islamworld.net/jihad.html>, p 4.
13. Ibid., p 8.
14. Qur'an 8:65.
15. Qur'an 8:15-16.
16. Kenneth Cragg & Marston Speight, *Islam From Within*, (Wadsworth Inc., 1980), p 213
17. Ibid., p 228.
18. Eric Silver, "Bomber quit intelligence service to join Hamas two days before attack," *Independent Digital* (UK) Ltd, 03 December 2001, www.independent.co.uk.

The Crusades

The Crusades were more complex than the simple and unfair invasion of Muslim lands by Christians often portrayed in history books. There is cruelty and conquering on both sides.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

At the Council of Clermont in 1095 Pope Urban II called upon Christians in Europe to respond to an urgent plea for help from Byzantine Christians in the East. Muslims were threatening to conquer this remnant of the Roman Empire for Allah. The threat was real; most of the Middle East, including the Holy Land where Christ had walked, had already been vanquished. Thus began the era of the Crusades, taken from the Latin word *crux* or cross. Committed to saving Christianity, the Crusaders left family and jobs to take up the cause. Depending on how one counts (either by the number of actual crusading armies or by the duration of the conflict), there were six Crusades between 1095 and 1270. But the crusading spirit would continue on for centuries, until Islam was no longer a menace to Europe.

There is a genuine difficulty for us to view the Crusades through anything but the eyes of a 21st century American. The notion of defending Christianity or the birthplace of Christ via military action is difficult to imagine or to support from Scripture, but perhaps a bit easier since the events of September 11th.

So when Christians today think about the Crusades, it may be with remorse or embarrassment. Church leaders, including the Pope, have recently made the news by apologizing to Muslims, and everyone else, for the events surrounding the Crusades. In the minds of many, the Crusades were an ill-advised fiasco that didn't accomplish the goals of permanently reclaiming Jerusalem and the Holy Lands.

Are history books correct when they portray the Crusades as an invasion of Muslim territories by marauding Europeans whose primary motive was to plunder new lands? What is often left out of the text is that most of the Islamic Empire had been Christian and had been militarily conquered by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Islam had suddenly risen out of nowhere to become a threat to all of Christian Europe, and although it had shown some restraint in its treatment of conquered Christians, it had exhibited remarkable cruelty as well. At minimum, Islam enforced economic and religious discrimination against those it controlled, making Jews and Christians second-class citizens. In some cases, Muslim leaders went further. An event that may have sparked the initial Crusade in 1095 was the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim.^[1] In fact, many Christians at the time considered al-Hakim to be the Antichrist.

We want black and white answers to troubling questions, but the Crusades present us with a complex collection of events, motivations, and results that make simple answers difficult to find. In this article we'll consider the origins and impact of this centuries-long struggle between the followers of Muhammad and the followers of Christ.

The Causes

Historian Paul Johnson writes that the terrorist attacks of September 11th can be seen as an extension of the centuries-long struggle between the Islamic East and the Christian West. Johnson writes,

The Crusades, far from being an outrageous prototype of Western imperialism, as is taught in most of our schools, were a mere episode in a struggle that has lasted 1,400 years, and were one of the few occasions when Christians took the offensive to regain the "occupied territories" of the

Islam had exploded on the map by conquering territories that had been primarily Christian. The cities of Antioch, Alexandria, and Carthage had been the centers of Christian thought and theological inquiry for centuries before being taken by Muslim armies in their jihad to spread Islam worldwide. Starting in 1095 and continuing for over four hundred years, the crusading spirit that pervaded much of Europe can be seen as an act of cultural self-preservation, much as Americans now see the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

One motivation for the Crusade in 1095 was the request for help made by the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I. Much of the Byzantine Empire had been conquered by the Seljuk Turks and Constantinople, the greatest Christian city in the world, was also being threatened. Pope Urban knew that the sacrifices involved with the call to fight the Turks needed more than just coming to the rescue of Eastern Christendom. To motivate his followers he added a new goal to free Jerusalem and the birthplace of Christ.

At the personal level, the Pope added the possibility of remission of sins. Since the idea of a pilgrim's vow was widespread in medieval Europe, crusaders, noblemen and peasant alike, vowed to reach the Holy Sepulcher in return for the church's pardon for sins they had committed. The church also promised to protect properties left behind by noblemen during travels east.

The Pope might launch a Crusade, but he had little control over it once it began. The Crusaders promised God, not the Pope to complete the task. Once on its way, the Crusading army was held together by "feudal obligations, family ties, friendship, or fear." {3}

Unlike Islam, Christianity had not yet developed the notion of

a holy war. In the fifth century Augustine described what constituted a *just war* but excluded the practice of battle for the purpose of religious conversion or to destroy heretical religious ideas. Leaders of nations might decide to go to war for just reasons, but war was not to be a tool of the church.^[4] Unfortunately, using Augustine's *just war* language, Popes and Crusaders saw themselves as warriors for Christ rather than as a people seeking justice in the face of an encroaching enemy threat.

The Events

The history books our children read typically emphasize the atrocities committed by Crusaders and the tolerance of the Muslims. It is true that the Crusaders slaughtered Jews and Muslims in the sacking of Jerusalem and later laid siege to the Christian city of Constantinople. Records indicate that Crusaders were even fighting among themselves as they fought Muslims. But a closer examination of the Crusades shows the real story is more complex than the public's perception or what is found in history books. The fact is that both Muslims and Christians committed considerable carnage and internal warfare and political struggles often divided both sides.

Muslims could be, and frequently were, barbaric in their treatment of Christians and Jews. One example is how the Turks dealt with German and French prisoners captured early in the First Crusade prior to the sacking of Jerusalem. Those who renounced Christ and converted to Islam were sent to the East; the rest were slaughtered. Even Saladin, the re-conqueror of Jerusalem was not always merciful. After defeating a large Latin army on July 3, 1187, he ordered the mass execution of all Hospitallers and Templars left alive, and he personally beheaded the nobleman Reynald of Chatillon. Saladin's secretary noted that:

He ordered that they should be beheaded, choosing to have them dead rather than in prison. With him was a whole band of

scholars and Sufis . . . [and] each begged to be allowed to kill one of them, and drew his sword and rolled back his sleeve. Saladin, his face joyful, was sitting on his dais; the unbelievers showed black despair.{5}

In fact, Saladin had planned to massacre all of the Christians in Jerusalem after taking it back from the Crusaders, but when the commander of the Jerusalem garrison threatened to destroy the city and kill all of the Muslims inside the walls, Saladin allowed them to buy their freedom or be sold into slavery instead.{6}

The treachery shown by the Crusaders against other Christians is a reflection of the times. At the height of the crusading spirit in Europe, Frederick Barbarossa assembled a large force of Germans for what is now known as the third Crusade. To ease his way, he negotiated treaties for safe passage through Europe and Anatolia, even getting permission from Muslim Turks to pass unhampered. On the other hand, the Christian Emperor of Byzantium, Isaac II, secretly agreed with Saladin to harass Frederick's crusaders through his territory. When it was deemed helpful, both Muslim and Christian made pacts with anyone who might further their own cause. At one point the sultan of Egypt offered to help the Crusaders in their struggle with the Muslim Turks, and the Turks failed to come to the rescue of the Shi'ite Fatimid Muslims who controlled Palestine.

Human treachery and sinfulness was evident on both sides of the conflict.

The Results

On May 29, 1453 the city of Constantinople fell to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II. With it the 2,206-year-old Roman Empire came to an end and the greatest Christian church in the world, the Hagia Sophia, was turned into a mosque. Some argue that this

disaster was a direct result of the Crusaders' misguided efforts, and that anything positive they might have accomplished was fleeting.

Looking back at the Crusades, we are inclined to think of them as a burst of short-lived, failed efforts by misguided Europeans. Actually, the crusading spirit lasted for hundreds of years and the Latin kingdom that was established in 1098, during the first Crusade, endured for almost 200 years. Jerusalem remained in European hands for eighty-eight years, a period greater than the survival of many modern nations.

Given the fact that the Latin kingdom and Jerusalem eventually fell back into Muslim hands, did the Crusaders accomplish anything significant? It can be argued that the movement of large European armies into Muslim held territories slowed down the advance of Islam westward. The presence of a Latin kingdom in Palestine acted as a buffer zone between the Byzantine Empire and Muslim powers and also motivated Muslim leaders to focus their attention on defense rather than offense at least for a period of time.

Psychologically, the Crusades resulted in a culture of chivalry based on both legendary and factual exploits of European rulers. The crusading kings Richard the Lionheart and Louis IX were admired even by their enemies as men of integrity and valor. Both saw themselves as acting on God's behalf in their quest to free Jerusalem from Muslim oppression. For centuries, European rulers looked to the Crusader kings as models of how to integrate Christianity and the obligations of knighthood.

Unfortunately, valor and the ability to conduct warfare took precedent over all other qualities, perhaps because it was a holdover from Frankish pagan roots and the worship of Odin the warrior god. These Germanic people may have converted to Christianity, but they still had a place in their hearts for the gallant warrior's paradise, Valhalla.[\[7\]](#) As one scholar

writes:

But the descendants of those worshippers of Odin still had the love of a warrior god in their blood, a god of warriors whose ultimate symbol was war.[\[8\]](#)

The Crusades temporarily protected some Christians from having to live under Muslim rule as second-class citizens. Called the *dhimmi*, this legal code enforced the superiority of Muslims and humiliated all who refused to give up other religious beliefs.

It is also argued that the crusading spirit is what eventually sent the Europeans off to the New World. The voyage of Columbus just happens to coincide with the removal of Muslim rule from Spain. The exploration of the New World eventually encouraged an economic explosion that the Muslim world could not match.

Summary

Muslims still point to the Crusades as an example of injustice perpetrated by the West on Islam. An interesting question might be, “Had the situation been reversed, would Muslims have felt justified in going to war against Christians?” In other words, would the rules in the Qur’an and the Hadith (the holy books of Islam) warrant a conflict similar to what the Crusaders conducted?

You have probably heard the term *jihad*, or struggle, discussed in the news. The word denotes different kinds of striving within the Muslim faith. At one level, it speaks of personal striving for righteousness. However, there are numerous uses of the term within Islam where it explicitly refers to warfare.

First, the Qur’an permits fighting to defend individual Muslims and the religion of Islam from attack.[\[9\]](#) In fact, all

able bodied Muslims are commanded to assist in defending the community of believers. Muslims are also given permission to remove treacherous people from power, even if they have previously agreed to a treaty with them.[{10}](#)

Muslims are encouraged to use armed struggle for the general purpose of spreading the message of Islam.[{11}](#) The Qur'an specifically says, "Fighting is a grave offense, but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque. . . ." [{12}](#) Warfare is also justified for the purpose of purging a people from the bondage of idolatry or the association of anything with God. This gives the Muslim a theological reason to go to war against Christians, since the Qur'an teaches that the doctrine of the Trinity is a form of idolatry. Had the situation been reversed, the religion of Islam provides multiple rationalizations for the actions of the Crusaders.

But is there a Christian justification for the Crusades? The only example of a Christian fighting in the New Testament is the apostle Peter when he drew his sword to protect Jesus from the Roman soldiers. Jesus told him to put the sword away. Then He said, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" The kingdom that Jesus had established would not be built on the blood of the unbeliever, but on the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

The Crusader's actions should be defended using Augustine's "just war" language rather than a holy war vocabulary. Although they did not always live up to the dictates of "just war" ideals, such as the immunity of noncombatants, the Crusades were a last resort defensive war that sought peace for its people who had been under constant assault for many years.

If one of the functions of a God-ordained government is to restrain evil and promote justice, then it follows that rulers

of nations where Christians dwell may need to conduct a *just war* in order to protect their people from invasion.

Notes

1. John Esposito, ed. *The Oxford History of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), 335.
2. Paul Johnson, National Review,
<http://www.nationalreview.com/15oct01/johnson101501.shtml>.
3. Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999), 10.
4. Ibid., 2.
5. Ibid., 78.
6. Ibid., 80.
7. Zoe Oldenbourg, *The Crusades*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 33.
8. Ibid, 32.
9. Qur'an 2:190, 193.
10. Ibid, 8:58.
11. Ibid, 2:217 (also see www.irshad.org/islam/iiie/iiie_18.htm published by The Institute of Islamic Information & Education, P.O. Box 41129, Chicago, IL 60641-0129).
12. Qur'an 2:217.

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A Christian Student of Islam Responds to the Sept. 11

Attacks

The events of Sept. 11 have left the nation stunned, and horrified. We all can empathize with Mayor Giuliani when he said, "I can't believe they would do this to our city!" The events have also left us with many questions. Following is a brief response to a couple of the most obvious questions most of us are asking.

1) Do acts like those perpetrated on Sept. 11 find any justification in Muslim theology?

This is an important question, and one which would probably be answered in different ways by different muslim groups and leaders. First, there is no question that there are passages in the Qur'an and in the Hadith (sayings traditionally attributed to Muhammad) which endorse the concept of "jihad." I am not going to quote them here. But any reader can look up the following references in the Koran (2:244; 3:195; 4:95; 9:5; 47:4), or passages in the Hadith collected by Al-Bukhari. It is no secret that the early spread of Islam was due in great measure to the carrying out of these injunctions by muslim forces. And today, extremist groups within the muslim world appeal to such passages as justification for their violent actions.

Jihad basically means "struggle" or "exertion," and refers to efforts aimed at defending or advancing the cause of Islam in the world. Many muslims consider jihad to be a sixth basic obligation, in addition to the traditional five pillars of Islam. Jihad, however, is not limited to the popular concept of "holy war." One muslim writer describes four types of jihad: that waged by the heart (the individual muslim's internal spiritual and moral struggle against evil, often called the "greater jihad"), that waged by the tongue (speaking in behalf of Islam), by the hand (setting forth a good example for Islam), and by the sword (armed conflict with

the enemies of Islam, the “lesser jihad”). (See the book entitled *Jihad: A Commitment to Universal Peace*, by Michael A. Boisard, p. 24.)

It must be noted, however, that the Koran itself places some limits on the practice of jihad: “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression” (2:190-193). Theoretically, then, “holy war” must be seen as justified by the “oppression” and “injustice” of the “enemies of Islam.” While many, perhaps most, muslims may condemn the actions carried out on Sept. 11, the extremists who do not can be expected to justify them on the grounds that in their eyes they were retribution for “injustice and oppression” against Islam.

2) What should our response be, as Christians, to these events?

This is not an easy or simple matter, for as Christians we find ourselves to be citizens of two kingdoms—one temporal and political, and the other spiritual and eternal. We must keep this in mind, as we prayerfully shape our response. Here are one Christian’s thoughts.

First, we must pray. Pray for the more moderate leaders in the muslim world. Pray that they will see the folly of endorsing these acts of terror. Pray that their voice will be heard, and that they will find the courage to distance themselves from the extremist groups. We must pray also for those who are committed to violence, that God will frustrate their plans. “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan, that can succeed against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30).

We must pray for the leaders of our country, and of other

countries that join with us (I Tim. 2:1-3). God has entrusted to government the responsibility of rewarding righteousness and punishing evil, and this includes the right to "bear the sword" or use military power in defense against evil (Rom. 13:1-5). We must pray for wisdom and courage on the part of our leaders, and that any military response will be shaped by the principles of the "just war" theory that has guided Christian thought since the time of St. Augustine. Any response must be "proportionate" and aimed at crippling the aggressor's ability to wage war, not at inflicting needless suffering on the innocent. As Christian citizens we should not only be prepared to pray for and support our government's response, but if called upon to serve in her defense.

Second, as Christian disciples, we must individually and personally turn to God at this time of great need. We must follow the example of the psalmist who said, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Ps. 56:3-4) It is only human to experience fear at a time such as this. But we must bring our fears to God, and rest on his almighty arm. Remember God's great and precious promises: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10)! We must draw near to God in personal repentance and faith, turning away from trust in any false "gods," for He alone is "our refuge and strength," our "ever-present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). We must be alert as well to opportunities to help others who are in search of a spiritual anchor in times of crisis. We can help by listening to people's concerns, by offering to pray for them or help in some practical way. We should not pretend that we are unaffected by the events that are unfolding; but we can let it be known that we are finding hope and peace as we lean on our faithful God.

As followers of Christ, we must remember that at the level of

our personal attitude and of our personal relationships, we are called not to hate but to love our enemies (Luke 6:27-28), not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17, 21). Many will allow these awful events to justify their own hatred and bigotry. We must not. While supporting the righteous actions of our government and of our military, we can at the same time ask God to lead us in showing love toward those in our personal circle of influence, whom others may be tempted to hate.

May God be gracious to us in protecting our land and our people. May He give wisdom and courage to our leaders, and to people of good will in every country. May He frustrate the plans of those who would spread terror. As He did in the days of Joseph, may He take that which is meant for evil and use it for good. May his goodness, justice, and faithfulness be magnified in all his works, and in us as his people. Amen.

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The Clash of Two Worldviews

November 4, 2001

The image of a plane slamming into the World Trade Center is indelibly imprinted in our minds. It was more than just an evil act—it was a horribly accurate illustration of the crash of two worldviews.

America works because it was built on the foundation of the Christian worldview, and because we have been richly blessed by God. But for the Arab world, much of it living a seventh-century lifestyle, trying to enter the modern world hasn't

worked. Importing the goodies of America's prosperity—things like jet planes, e-mail and McDonald's—is easy. Importing what it takes to produce these things isn't. America is blessed with things we take for granted—a free market, accountability in our political systems, and the rule of law. These things work because they are based on a Christian worldview.

The founding fathers embraced the Christian beliefs in both the intrinsic value of the individual as God's image-bearer and the sinfulness of fallen man living in a fallen world. So they wisely set up checks and balances that allowed self-expression and self-government to flourish while at the same time setting limits to restrain the sin nature. Our political system splits power between the executive, judicial and legislative branches. Our free market system results in the benefits of competition. America's political and economic systems work because they are based on a Christian worldview. The Islamic worldview doesn't see man as fallen and sinful, just weak, misled and forgetful of God. There is no room for individual freedom or expression, and we see this in the lack of development of Islamic science or technology or creativity.

The rule of law is such a part of America that many of us don't know what it is. It means we are a nation of laws rather than men; we are governed by laws rather than by individuals. It means no man is above the law. This comes from a biblical worldview that teaches all men are fallen creatures who cannot be trusted to govern well unless they submit to a transcendent authority. In an Islamic worldview, where there is no concept of separation of church and state, political leaders can and do demand submission to themselves. They ARE the law.

Many Muslim leaders hate the West because the decadent pleasures of Western culture are luring the faithful away from Islam. Of course, many Christians share this abhorrence for the culture's indulgence in immorality, pornography, sexual perversion and divorce. But regardless of whether it's the positive strengths that are a result of our foundational

Christian worldview, or the negative worldly pleasures that result from abandoning it, our current war on terrorism is the result of a clash of worldviews. Which is why it won't be solved easily or anytime soon, and we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

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