“Why Do Muslims and Christians Fight and Kill Each Other?”

Dear Mr. Closson,

Thank you for your information about Islam and Christianity. But I want to know, why have Muslims and Christians always fought and killed each other? What factors are involved?

The easy answer is sin. As Paul says in the book of Romans, “…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God…” A more complex answer is that the two world religions have mutually exclusive truth claims about the nature of God and the person of Jesus Christ. For one to be true the other must be false. However, individual Christians who encounter opposing truth claims should heed the words of Peter and share the hope we have in Christ with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). The New Testament gives no justification for doing violence to any human being because of his or her beliefs. Our example is Christ, who humbled Himself even to the point of dying on the cross rather than to strike back at his enemies.

The example of Muhammad is quite different. He was a military leader and was actively engaged in having his enemies assassinated. The Koran teaches that those who leave the faith are to be killed, as are those of other faiths who reject the authority of Islamic rule. The aggressiveness with which Islam conquered previously Christian territory in the eighth century pretty much guaranteed a difficult relationship between the two people.

Please don’t take this as an excuse for unjust violence done in the name of Christ. Nor does what is written here take into account the possible right of nations or governments to

protect their people from outside invasion or violence. What I am mainly talking about is the response of individuals to the existence of opposing truth claims.

Thanks for the thoughtful question!

Sincerely,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

“Why Do You Lie About Islam?”

Why do you say lies about Islam? You have to be fair when descriping 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'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, the 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 Christian 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 spend 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 attacked, 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 monthestic 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

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.

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