CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 74: Christians & Muslims

Christians & Muslims: Did You Know?

Unusual fruits of Western encounters with Islam.

Elesha Coffman

Daffodils and turbans

Though most closely associated now with the Netherlands, tulips hail from modern-day Turkey. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the Holy Roman Empire's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1500s, noticed the striking flowers while on a trip to Istanbul. The Turks called them ***lalé***, but Busbecq's interpreter mistakenly gave him the term ***dulban*** or ***tülbend*** (turban), which was further corrupted to ***tulip***. The ambassador sent some bulbs back to a gardener friend in Vienna, where they generated a stir that eventually blossomed into "tulipomania."

Sport of sheikhs

Long before blue grass and white fences came on the scene, horses ran for the roses in the Arabian desert. Horse breeding probably started in Central Asia, perhaps as early as 4500 b.c., but those sturdy beasts were built mainly for war and heavy labor, not speed. Arabian horses, by contrast, were useful in raids largely because of their blazing quickness. This also made them a lot more fun to play with. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when European princes wanted to rev up the local ponies, they purchased stallions in Islamic Turkey and Arabia. All Thoroughbreds today can trace pedigrees back to three stallions imported to Britain between 1690 and 1730: Godolphin Arabian, Byerly Turk, and Darley Arabian 2. No wonder the world's richest race is run in Dubai.

Middle Eastern menu

One needn't be a falafel fan to partake of quintessentially Middle Eastern food. The names for all of these delicacies come from Arabic: apricot, artichoke, banana, citrus, coffee, ginger, lemon, orange, sherbet, sorbet, and sugar. Other English words with Arabic roots include alcove, algebra, almanac, caravan, cipher, magazine, monsoon, nadir, sheriff, sofa, talisman, tariff, zenith, and zero.

Library circulation

Documents copied or stolen from Muslim libraries fueled the European Renaissance. Works of Aristotle and many other ancient greats had been lost in the West for centuries before traders and crusaders reintroduced them. However, Muslims cannot take full credit for the learning they cultivated. Muslims got many documents from Roman and Byzantine libraries that came under their control during Islam's early expansion (see page 19), and Muslim leaders often employed Christian scholars as tutors (see page 39). In this way Islam both drove a wedge between Eastern and Western Christians, by occupying the territory between them, and bridged them, by facilitating an extremely belated intellectual exchange.

Pawn to Sultan four

Knights, bishops, and rooks may smack of medieval Europe, but chess may have originated in about the same time and place as Islam: seventh-century Arabia. And like early Islam, chess had Persian,

Arabian, and even Indian influences. In that era, land-based trade routes through Asia formed the backbone of world commerce, putting people and artifacts from scattered regions in close contact. Muhammad learned much about the world from such exchanges, though not all of his information was reliable (see page 10).

Unpopular music

It's probably been a long time since any Methodist church put "For the Mahometans," a selection from John and Charles Wesley's 1780 hymn collection, up on the song board. For one thing, the text refers to Muhammad as a Unitarian. Actually, many eighteenth-century Christians would have agreed, as one of few things they knew about Muhammad was his insistance that "There is no God but Allah" (see page 14). Of course, the hymn has a few other incendiary phrases as well, though many Christians then—and not a few now—would stand by them:

> The smoke of the infernal cave,
> Which half the Christian world o'erspread,
> Disperse, Thou heavenly Light, and save
> The souls by that Impostor led,
> That Arab-chief, as Satan bold,
> Who quite destroyed Thy Asian fold.
>
> O might the blood of sprinkling cry
> For those who spurn the sprinkled blood!
> Assert Thy glorious Deity,
> Stretch out Thine arm, Thou Triune God
> The Unitarian fiend expel,
> And chase his doctrine back to hell.

Count on it

Westerners call our numbers "Arabic," because the notation system came to Europe via Islamic Arab mathematicians sometime in the Middle Ages. The first written record of Arabic numbers in the West is a Spanish codex from 976. Adoption crept along among the educated elite until the fourteenth century, when Italian merchants finally ditched their Roman I's and V's. Other traders wisely followed suit. Interestingly, Arabs didn't develop the "Arabic" number system. They picked it up around 750 from Hindus, who had invented it some 150 years earlier.

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Christians & Muslims: From the Editor - The Cover's Story

A picture of Hagia Sophia, heavy with Christian and Islamic symbolism, speaks of centuries of ambition, sorrow, and bad faith.

Elesha Coffman

On January 27, 537, Byzantine Emperor Justinian dedicated the magnificent Church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople. "Glory to God, Who has deemed me worthy of fulfilling such a work," he prayed. "O Solomon, I have surpassed thee."

About a generation later, a widow in Mecca gave birth to a son named Muhammad. He reportedly prophesied to one of his followers, "You shall conquer Constantinople. Glory be to the prince and to the army that shall achieve it." Muslim armies tried repeatedly to make the prophecy come true, besieging Justinian's capital seven times in as many centuries.

The siege party in 1453 brought an extra weapon—the Janissaries, an elite corps of men taken as children from Christian families and raised as Islamic warriors. With this force Sultan Muhammad II overwhelmed the defenses of the last Emperor Constantine, who spurred his horse into the oncoming ranks of Janissaries and was never seen again. Muslim fighters broke down the doors of Hagia Sophia and killed or imprisoned hundreds of Christians hiding inside.

Muslims transformed Hagia Sophia into a mosque by removing Christian objects, whitewashing mosaics, and installing plaques with Qur'anic texts on the pediments. As our cover image shows, though, the transformation was hardly complete. Some Christian ornaments were destroyed, but many were merely hidden.

After Turkey became a secular republic, in 1924, Hagia Sophia became a cultural museum, and art historians were able to restore dozens of Christian elements. Today, the Christian and Islamic embellishments coexist awkwardly in a space no faith can claim. When Pope Paul VI visited the site in 1967 and privately recited a Hail Mary, a group of Muslim students responded the next day by performing a ritual prayer and sending the Vatican a picture of Muhammad the Conqueror.

Like the Qur'anic plaques, Islam was grafted onto a Judeo-Christian foundation. Like the mosaics, Christian communities in lands conquered by Muslims have experienced aggression, attempted transformation, benign neglect, and periods of restoration. And like Hagia Sophia, places that have been occupied alternately or simultaneously by both religions provoke intense passions.

Byzantine historian Georgius Phrantzes, who watched the cathedral fall, lamented, "How unfathomable and incomprehensible is Thy wise judgment, O King Christ! ... Who would not have mourned for you, O holy temple!"

When human wisdom fails to grasp the divine mind, we do mourn. We should also try to learn.

The new issue of Christian History looks at the historical places, people, and events that continue to shape Christian-Muslim relationships. The Crusades, which we addressed in issue 40 (1993) and revisit in this issue, may be the most cited flashpoint, but they are only a slice of the story. Encounters between the two faiths have produced a range of outcomes, from repression to debate to

radical reconsiderations of Christian theology. Much of the tale remains "unfathomable and incomprehensible," but, especially now, it must be told.

- Articles from Christian History issue 74: Christians & Muslims will be featured at www.christianhistory.net throughout the next three months. To order a copy of the issue now, click here.

Recent Christianity Today International articles on the subject of Christians and Muslims include:

from Books & Culture

- Forgotten Christians
- Jesus Through Muslim Eyes
- The Prophet's Pulpit
- Muhammad Through Christian Eyes

from Christianity Today

- Outpaced by Islam?
- Is the God of Muhammad the Father of Jesus?
- Does God Hear Muslims' Prayers?
- Wisdom in a Time of War

from Today's Christian Woman

- I Was a Daughter of Islam

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Muhammad amid the Faiths

The prophet's interactions with paganism, Judaism, and Christianity birthed puzzling prophecies and a legacy of strife.

James A. Beverley

An old Arab tradition tells of Abraha, a powerful Christian warrior from Abyssinia, who was set to besiege Mecca just after the middle of the sixth century. Abraha wanted to destroy the ka'ba, the main shrine of Mecca, along with its idols.

When soldiers tried to get Abraha's elephant, Mahmud, to join in the campaign, Mahmud refused. Instead, he bowed in prayer toward the holy shrine, which Muslims believe was built by Abraham.

Despite the embellishment, this story illustrates that the Arabian peninsula was home to Christian, Jewish, and pagan traditions prior to the birth of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. While this tale ends with a peaceful twist, contact between the faiths has more often involved searing conflict.

Mobile melting pot

By the fourth century, Christianity had a major presence in Africa and a lesser presence in southern Arabia. By the fifth century, a sizeable Jewish population also lived throughout Arabia. In the early sixth century, Dhu Nuwas, a Jewish leader, ruled part of Arabia, and Christians were at peril under his reign. In the town of Zafar, 200 Christians were burned inside their church. Paganism thrived outside the enclaves of the two monotheistic faiths.

Muhammad was born about 570. His father died near the time of his birth, and he lost his mother when he was 6. He was cared for briefly by his grandfather and then raised by Abu Talib, his uncle, who was also head of the prominent Hashim clan in Mecca.

In the closing decades of the sixth century, a thriving trade network spread from Saudi Arabia north to Syria, east as far as India, and into northern Africa. Early Muslim histories report that Muhammad traveled with his uncle on trading journeys as far as Syria.

Muhammad most likely learned about Christianity through contacts with Christians along the trade routes of the Middle East. Unfortunately, traders were seldom reliable theologians. Muhammad gained a grasp of monotheism from his Christian and Jewish acquaintances, but he never understood the orthodoxies of either religion.

Marked for greatness

Muslims, of course, do not believe that any earthly influences tainted Muhammad's message. He was a prophet and spoke solely for God, though only a prescient few recognized this at first.

In one famous Muslim legend, Muhammad encountered a Syrian Christian monk named Bahira on the caravan trail. According to Ibn Ishaq, the famous biographer of Muhammad, Bahira was expecting to see a prophet when Abu Talib's company visited him.

No one seemed to fit the prophetic description, though, so Bahira implored everyone from the caravan to come to the feast he had prepared. Bahira called in Muhammad and questioned him about his spiritual life. Then the monk "looked at his back and saw the seal of prophethood [some physical mark] between his shoulders." Bahira then told Abu Talib to take his nephew home "and guard him carefully against the Jews." He also reportedly told him that "a great future lies before this nephew of yours."

According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad's life changed forever in the year 610, on the seventeenth night of the Arabic month Ramadan, when the angel Gabriel called him to be a prophet of God (Allah). Muhammad's first wife, the wealthy widow Khadijah, and a few friends affirmed his newfound monotheism, but he met fierce resistance in polytheistic Mecca.

Allah confirmed Muhammad's prophethood in 620, bringing him by night to Jerusalem. There he conversed with Jesus, Moses, and Abraham. Then, according to the Qur'an, Muhammad and his angel companion were taken by ladder (called a miraj) to the seventh heaven. Muslims believe that the Dome of the Rock was built on the site of his ascension.

Meccans, however, still rejected Muhammad's message and persecuted the messenger. So, in 622 (year 1 of the Muslim calendar), Muhammad fled to Medina, about 250 miles north of Mecca.

For eight long and bitter years, the prophet and his small but growing cohort battled his Meccan enemies. He experienced significant victories, notably on March 15, 624, at Badr, and major setbacks, including a battle at Uhud just a year later.

By January 630, Muhammad triumphed, took control of Mecca, and destroyed the idols in the ka'ba—except, according to tradition, the statues of Jesus and Mary, which he left untouched. Medina, however, continued to be his home base. From there he launched a major military campaign into Syria and arranged treaties with Christian tribes.

Muhammad made a final pilgrimage to Mecca in early 632. He was in poor health but made it back to Medina. He died there on June 8, 632, in the embrace of Aisha, his favorite wife.

A garbled gospel

Though Muhammad had regular (and often hostile) contact with Jewish tribes, particularly in Medina, there is no evidence that he had sustained interaction with Christians. Likewise, there is no hard evidence that the Gospels were translated into Arabic during his lifetime. F.E. Peters states in his work Muhammad and the Origins of Islam that most of the Christian terms in the Qur'an are from an Aramaic dialect.

Muhammad's unfamiliarity with orthodox Christians or with their Scriptures is evident throughout the Qur'an. The text refutes Christian claims that Jesus died on the cross, that he was the son of God, and that God is a triune being. It also refutes claims Christians have never made, including that Mary was a sister of Aaron and Moses (Sura 19:28) and that Mary was part of the Trinity.

Muslims do not accept the prophet's ignorance as the reason for these discrepancies. They argue that Muhammad and his text are correct, but Christians and Jews corrupted their Scriptures—every single copy.

Cultural factors also contributed to Muhammad's misunderstanding of Christianity. Given the common Arab view in his time that success signals divine blessing, it would have been very difficult for him to believe that Allah would let any of his prophets die by crucifixion. The Qur'an scoffs at the very idea.

Sura 4:157 contains the famous denial. After reference to those who attack God's prophets, it talks about

those who boast "we killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God."

The text goes on to say: "but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not."

From this one verse comes Muslim objection to the Christian redemption narrative.

Ahmed Deedat, a popular Muslim apologist, goes to great lengths to argue that the New Testament actually teaches what was revealed to Muhammad on the topic. Deedat's pamphlet ***Crucifixion or Crucifiction?*** claims that abandoning belief in Calvary will free the Christian "from his infatuation and will have freed the Muslim world from missionary aggression and harassment."

Peoples of the Book

Whatever mistakes Muhammad may have made about the Bible, his ideology is largely framed in terms of Jewish and Christian concepts and practices. He considered himself the heir to both traditions, and early portions of the Qur'an express a clear hope that the "peoples of the Book" would accept Muhammad as a prophet. When they did not, Muhammad's patience wore thin.

Later portions of the Qur'an build a strong polemic against both Jews and Christians, condemning the former for their unbelief and the latter for their confusing and erroneous views about Jesus' death and identity. Still, Muhammad retained a positive outlook toward Christians in general. This is illustrated along several lines.

First, Muhammad decreed that Christians (and Jews) were to receive protection under Muslim rule. Pagan Arabs faced a much harder reality: convert or die.

Muhammad extended personal hospitality to Christians on at least one occasion. When he was in Medina, he received a delegation of Christian leaders, led by Abu Harith, the bishop of Najran. Given contemporary Muslim anger over the American presence in Saudi Arabia, it is more than significant that Muhammad met the Christians in the mosque in Medina, and that he allowed them to pray there facing Jerusalem, as was the Christian custom.

Muhammad also sent a letter to assure Christian groups of protection under his rule. Muslim historian Abu Abd Allah ibn Sa'ad, who died in 845, preserved two versions of the letter, which reads somewhat like the famous pact that Umar, a later Muslim leader, made with a Christian tribe.

One version of Muhammad's letter states: "All their churches, services and monastic practices had the protection of God and His messenger. No bishop will be removed from his episcopate, no monk from his monastic state, no priest from his priesthood. There will be no alteration of any right or authority or circumstance, so long as they are loyal and perform their obligations well."

Muhammad showed less tolerance for Jews. He forced two powerful Jewish tribes out of Medina after they rejected his prophetic claims. A third tribe, the Qurayza, was dealt with more harshly.

When the Qurayza did not come to the aid of the prophet, he confined them in a compound, then dug a trench in the market area. In the words of Ibn Ishaq, the Islamic biographer, the prophet "then sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches."

Muhammad took no similar action against any Christian groups, but the prophet's military campaigns against fellow Arabs, the massacre of the Qurayza, and the raid into Syria near the end of his life laid the

ideological groundwork for Muslim persecution of Christians. Likewise, the polemic of the Qur'an provided theological justification for the later ***jihad*** against Christians as the Muslim empire expanded west to Spain, north to Constantinople, and east to the farthest corners of Asia.

Neither the Qur'an nor Muhammad's legacy is unequivocal on the proper relationship between Muslims and members of other faiths. Muslims still internally debate whether Allah would approve of all the steps the prophet's followers have taken along his path.

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Night vision.

Led by the angel Jabril (Gabriel) and carried by the mythical creature Buraq, Muhammad journeys from "the sacred place of worship" (Mecca) to "the further place of worship" (Jerusalem) and finally to heaven, where beautiful maidens offer him gifts. The vision was Muhammad's reward for withstanding persecution. Islamic martyrs are promised the same treatment.

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Islam 101

Basics of a foreign faith

The Five Pillars of Islam

1. ***Shahadah:*** Confession of faith. "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger."

2. ***Salat:*** Prayer. All Muslims are to pray five times every day, facing Mecca.

3. ***Zakat:*** Tithing. Muslims must give at least 2.5 percent of their total wealth to the poor and needy.

4. ***Sawm:*** Fasting. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims are to refrain from food, water, and sex from sunrise to sunset.

5. ***Hajj:*** Pilgrimage. If at all possible, at least once in a lifetime Muslims are to travel to Mecca to engage in rituals of prayer and worship at the central shrine in Islam's holiest city.

The Qur'an

- The Qur'an, in Arabic, is the perfect Word of Allah.
- The Qur'an contains 114 chapters, or ***suras***.
- Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel.
- The Qur'anic material was composed from 610 through Muhammad's death in 632.
- The final compilation was completed about 650.

The Prophet

- Most Muslims believe that Muhammad was sinless, but not divine.
- Most Muslims believe that the prophet was illiterate.
- The prophetic status of Muhammad is not to be questioned.
- Muhammad provides the greatest example for all aspects of life.
- The traditions about the prophet are known as ***hadith***.
- Allah gave the prophet permission to have 12 wives.

Other Major Muslim Beliefs

- Islam started with Adam, not with Muhammad.
- People are saved by the will of God through obedience to God's law, ***Shari'ah***.
- Though humans are imperfect, they are not fallen through original sin.
- Those chosen by God for salvation will enter paradise. Only God knows whom he has chosen.
- The damned will burn in eternal torment in Hell.
- All countries and peoples should follow Islam and Islamic law.
- Muslims are to engage in ***jihad***, which usually means private spiritual struggle.
- Jihad sometimes demands defense of Muslim territory and military aggression.
- God will restore the world at the end of time through a coming human leader known as the ***Mahdi***.
- Muslim males can marry up to four wives.

Muslim Groups

- Almost 90 percent of Muslims belong to the Sunni tradition.
- Shi'ite Islam is popular in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and several Persian Gulf states.
- Sufi Islam represents the mystical path.
- The Islam practiced in most Muslim countries is heavily influenced by local folk customs.

Muslim Views of Jesus

- Jesus was a prophet of God but not the Son of God. He was a lesser prophet than Muhammad.
- He was born of the virgin Mary.
- He performed many miracles.
- He was protected from a death of crucifixion.
- He did not rise from the dead.
- He ascended to heaven after his death, and he will return to earth.
- He was a faithful Muslim, or follower of Allah.

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Secrets of Islam's Success

It spread faster than any other religion in history. Here are some reasons why.

Elesha Coffman

When Muhammad died, in 632, Islam could boast only semi-stable control over part of the Arabian peninsula. The prophet's territorial gains had been mainly pagan losses. Further expansion required conquest of Christian lands—a task that would prove all too easy, thanks to years of imperial and doctrinal wars.

To Islam's west lay Egypt and the rest of Christian North Africa. Once consolidated under the Roman Empire, by the sixth century the territory was divided between Latin-speaking Berbers in the west and Greek-speaking Byzantines in the east, with a few Baal-worshipers in the south.

Africa's theological divisions ran even deeper. Byzantines upheld the two-faceted definition of Christ's nature affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but Egypt's Monophysite ("one nature") Christians, along with churches in Armenia and Syria, vehemently rejected it. African Christianity was also plagued by controversies among catholics, Donatists (who insisted that all other Christians were apostate), Nestorians (who disagreed with both Monophysite and Chalcedonian Christology), and radical desert ascetics.

To Islam's near north and east sprawled the massive, though fading, Persian Sassanid Empire. The Zoroastrian Persians had persecuted Christians severely in the fourth century, judging the new friends of Persia's old enemy, Rome, to be a threat. After a toleration edict in 409, though, the Persians opted to control the church rather than destroy it.

By meddling in ecclesiastical governance, Persia had sent the local church into serious decline by the turn of the seventh century. Conflict between Nestorians, the majority Christian group, and their sworn enemies, Monophysites, hastened the slide.

To the northwest lay the shrinking Byzantine Empire, the remains of Roman glory. By Muhammad's time, battles with Persia had forced the Byzantines to withdraw from provinces such as Egypt and Syria and protect their capital, Constantinople. The Egyptians and Syrians were glad to see them go, taking their high taxes and persecution of "heretical" churches with them.

Hail to the new chiefs

With the Middle East in such disarray, Muhammad's successors were able to make rapid gains. The Muslims proved to be both fearsome warriors and shrewd politicians, sometimes killing or uprooting their enemies, sometimes grinding them down with economic and religious oppression.

The first Islamic ***caliph*** (deputy), Abu Bakr, was murdered before he could make much of a military impact beyond central Arabia, but his successor, Umar, routed a Byzantine army in Syria and hounded the last Persian shah to his death. Damascus, Jerusalem, and the Persian capital, Ctesiphon, fell like dominoes.

Umar solidified control of the Arabian peninsula and assumed at least nominal authority over Persia's

far-flung properties. He also built the first mosque in Jerusalem. But his stunning success created challenges.

Christians significantly outnumbered Muslims in most of Islam's new territories. In addition, Christians had diplomatic and medical expertise that Muslims lacked. Killing all of the Christians made no political sense, and in any case, the Qur'an advocates better treatment for "Peoples of the Book." Umar's solution, as described in his famous pact (see page 16), established Christians and Jews as dhimmi, or protected persons.

On the surface, the terms seem quite fair, especially for the seventh century. In exchange for paying extra taxes, dhimmi qualified for nearly all rights and protections under Islamic law. More importantly, unlike pagan Arabs, Christians and Jews were not forced to convert to Islam.

Christians thought they were getting a good deal. High taxes were nothing new, and Muslim authorities took no sides in the bitter doctrinal wars that divided the Christians. The Nestorian patriarch wrote to a fellow cleric, "They have not attacked the Christian religion, but rather they have commended our faith, honored our priests ... and conferred benefits on churches and monasteries."

Stealth oppression

Unfortunately, seventh-century Christians failed to see the deeper threat of Umar's bargain. Modern apologists for Islamic tolerance generally make the same mistake. Protected status really meant second- or third-class status, with strictures guaranteed to erode all religions but Islam.

Granted, both Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Roman) Christian powers put a high priority on enforcing what they deemed to be true religion, and neither was above using physical or civil coercion to achieve this aim—in the seventh century or for centuries afterward.

Indeed, Muslims apparently adapted parts of their policy on other religions from existing Christian codes. It is less often reported that Muslims also looked to Persia's ghetto-like melet system for guidance.

At various times, especially under comparatively secular caliphs, Islamic regimes did display more religious tolerance than Christian regimes, particularly toward Jews. But neither the Qur'an nor Islamic law, which are much more closely linked than the Bible and any past or present system of governance, ever sanctioned the fundamental equality that predicates modern tolerance.

One of the most popular verses in the Qur'an states, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:258). Yet the Qur'an also mandates:

> "Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His Apostle have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection" (9:29).

Umar's pact is thus not a peace treaty, but a description of the terms of his victory. Per the prophet's instructions, it prohibits what Allah prohibits (wine) and imposes a steep tax—failure to pay the poll tax (***jizya***) voided the contract. It also codifies Muslim superiority while humiliating anyone who clings to another religion.

Even some provisions that seem preferential undercut non-Muslim communities. For example, dhimmi were exempted from military service—and from the rich bonuses in pay and plunder that soldiers received. This placed dhimmi beneath ***mawali***, recent Arab converts to Islam who were barred from

some privileges but could serve in the military.

Despite the obvious incentives to convert, most Christians and Jews under early Muslim rule held onto their faith. But resistance eventually died out in all but a few pockets. The inability to build new places of worship or repair old ones, the prohibition on evangelism, and the fact that Muslim men could marry Christian and Jewish women (and raise their children as Muslims) while dhimmi could marry only their own kind achieved exactly what they were supposed to achieve. Islam won the region.

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The Pact of Umar

Islamic protection came with a price.

Last Saturday, in the Kenyan town of Machakos, representatives of Sudan's northern-based Muslim government joined with a Christian-led southern rebel faction to sign a protocol that could eventually end the country's 19-year civil war. While still short of a full peace accord, the accomplishment is impressive. To reach this détente after a bloody roller-coaster ride of ethnic and religious warfare, Sudan's Muslim rulers have had to back away from a pact supposedly as old as Islam itself.

The Pact of Umar, a document purportedly signed by the second caliph, Umar I (634-44), is the source of the restrictive regulations on non-Muslims embedded in the ***shari'a*** or Islamic law. In 1983, Sudan's northern Muslim government took a fundamentalist turn and imposed the ***shari'a*** on the Christian south. This triggered the warfare that has since killed more than 2 million Sudanese and displaced millions more.

Under ***shari'a***, both Jewish and Christian minorities (***dhimmi***, or literally "protected peoples") have freedom to remain in Muslim countries but no freedom to recruit. Conversions can only be to Islam, not away from it.

Like other early and medieval documents with weighty consequences for politics and religion, Umar's pact is hard to pin down to a date. It may have originated as early as 673, after the Muslims conquered Christian Syria and Palestine. But scholars date the text in its current form to about the ninth century.

The pact is purportedly written by the conquered Christians themselves. In it, those Christian subjects gratefully receive the protection of their Muslim masters and in return agree to certain religious and social strictures:

> "We shall not build, in our cities or in their neighborhood, new monasteries, churches, convents, or monks' cells, nor shall we repair, by day or by night, such of them as fall in ruins or are situated in the quarters of the Muslims.
>
> "We shall keep our gates wide open for passersby and travelers. We shall give board and lodging to all Muslims who pass our way for three days. ...
>
> "We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor convert anyone to it. We shall not prevent any of our kin from entering Islam if they wish it.
>
> "We shall show respect toward the Muslims, and we shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit.
>
> "We shall not seek to resemble the Muslims by imitating any of their garments, the cap, the turban, footwear, or the parting of the hair. We shall not speak as they do, nor shall we adopt their surnames.
>
> "We shall not mount on saddles, nor shall we gird swords nor bear any kind of arms nor carry them on our persons. ...

> "We shall not sell fermented drinks.
>
> "We shall shave the fronts of our heads. ...
>
> "We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims. We shall use only clappers [wooden noisemakers used to call people to worship] in our churches very softly.
>
> "We shall not raise our voices when following our dead. We shall not carry lighted candles on any of the roads of the Muslims or in their markets. We shall not bury our dead near the Muslims."

Whatever its true age, the pact has been used as the model for Muslims' treatment of Christians and Jews in many territories from the Middle Ages down to today. Under its strictures, ***dhimmi*** have been disallowed from exerting any authority over Muslims in many Muslim countries, and so have been barred from the army or civil service. Often, they have also had to pay an onerous head-tax or tribute (***jizya***).

Some Muslims and non-Muslims have pointed to the ***dhimmi*** tradition rooted in the Pact of Umar as proof that Muslims have treated "religious others" with relative tolerance. Certainly, throughout most of world history, Muslims have not dealt with the monotheistic Christians and Jews as implacable foes, as they have the pagans. Rather, they have allowed these fellow "peoples of the book" living in their territories to keep practicing their own religion.

However, history has seen both less and more oppressive implementations of the ***dhimmi*** system, sometimes mixed with the sterner practices of ***jihad***. And clearly Christians in Sudan have decided that the price of Islamic protection in this tradition is high enough to warrant resistance to the death.

Faced with such resistance, the modern Muslim leaders of Sudan seem at last to be backing away from the ancient pact. The Machakos Protocol is the fruit of several years of such retreat. Practically, this has already meant the easing of strict Islamic dress codes and other social legislation-enough that non-Muslim exiles have begun returning home.

Under the new protocol, the Muslims have agreed that though they may impose ***shari'a*** in the north, they will not infringe on non-Muslims' rights by doing so in the south. Northern leaders will have six years to prove they are serious about creating a friendlier environment for Christian and other non-Muslim Sudanese to practice their faiths. After that time, southern Sudanese will be able to vote in a referendum deciding whether to stay with the largely Muslim north or form an independent state.

Time will tell whether the legacy of Umar can be so swiftly disowned.

For two alternative texts of the pact itself, see http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pact-umar.html and http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jews-umar.html.

On the recent events in Sudan, see http://www.christianitytoday.com/ctmag/features/international/africa/sudan.html.

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A Deadly Give and Take

Crusaders fought many terrible battles in the Middle East, but Muslims started - and won - the war.

Paul Crawford

Osama bin Laden called America's response to September 11, a "new crusade and Jewish campaign led by the big crusader Bush under the flag of the cross." He clearly meant to link the military campaign to European campaigns from a millennium ago, during which, the prevailing mentality holds, Christian warriors unjustly attacked Islamic possessions in and around Palestine.

By establishing this connection, though, the fugitive fanatic admits more than he alleges. In the Middle Ages, as in 2001, Islam struck first—and in such a way that the West would certainly respond.

Waves of conquest

Jerusalem has changed hands many times over the centuries, but the seventh century was particularly tumultuous. Pagan Persians stormed the city in 614. Eastern Christians, led by Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, reclaimed it by 630. Within a few years, though, Islamic forces had broken the Byzantine military and chased them out of Palestine.

Jerusalem surrendered to a Muslim army in 638. Construction began soon afterward on a mosque at the Temple Mount. Sophronicus, the patriarch of the city, is said to have burst into tears and wailed, "Truly this is the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet!"

After capturing Jerusalem, the Muslim armies poured through the eastern and southern provinces of the reeling Byzantine Empire. In the 640s Armenia in the north and Egypt in the south fell to Islam. In 655 the Muslims won a naval battle with the Byzantines and very nearly captured the Byzantine emperor.

By 711 Muslims controlled all of northern Africa, and a Muslim commander named Tariq had set foot on European soil—on a rock that took his name (Jebel al-Tariq, corrupted into Gibraltar). By 712 Muslims had penetrated deep into Christian Spain. At the battle of Toledo that year, they defeated the Spanish and killed their king. The Spanish kingdom promptly collapsed.

Surviving Christians retreated into the mountains of northwestern Spain and dug in their defenses. The Muslim armies bypassed them and began raiding across the Pyrenees into France.

Meanwhile, in the East, Muslims continued to push into the Byzantine Empire. By 717 they had landed in southeastern Europe, and they besieged the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Had they taken the city, they might have conquered the entire continent. But the Byzantines resisted. Their capital would not fall to Islam until 1453.

Western Christians stopped the Muslim advance into their territory in 732 at the Battle of Tours (or Poitiers), France. Charles of Heristal, Charlemagne's grandfather, led a Frankish army against a large Muslim raiding party and defeated them, though Muslim raiders would continue attacking Frankish territory for decades. For his victory, Charles became known as the Hammer—in French, Charles Martel.

After regrouping, Muslim forces began to move into south central Europe, lauching invasions of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica in the ninth century. They mounted operations on the Italian mainland as well, sometimes at the invitation of quarrelling Christian powers.

In 846 Muslim raiders attacked the outlying areas of Rome, the center of western Christianity. This act would be comparable to Christians sacking Mecca or Medina, something they have never done.

Toward the end of the ninth century, Muslim pirate havens were established along the coast of southern France and northern Italy. These pirates threatened commerce, communication, and pilgrim traffic for a hundred years or more.

During the tenth century, however, the tide began to turn. In the East in the 950s and 960s, the Byzantines mounted a series of counterattacks. They eventually recovered the islands of Crete and Cyprus and a good bit of territory in Asia Minor and northern Syria, including Antioch. They lacked the strength to retake Jerusalem, though they might have struggled harder had they known what terrors the city would soon face.

New threats

In 1000, much—perhaps even most—of the population of the Holy Land was still Christian, of one affiliation or another. This was about to change.

One reason was the rise of a local Muslim ruler named Hakim, who was possibly insane and certainly not an orthodox Muslim (he claimed to be divine). Hakim persecuted Christians and Jews fiercely. In 1009 he ordered the destruction of the rebuilt Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Christian population of the Holy Land began to shrink under his tyrannical rule.

Hakim aroused great hostility even from other Muslims, and his reign was soon over. The Byzantines, distressed by the damage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, negotiated with the Muslims and in 1038 were allowed to begin rebuilding it again. But the losses to the local Christian (and Jewish) communities were harder to repair.

Another, and perhaps more serious, cause of distress for the local populations of all faiths was the intrusion into the Middle East of the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks, pagan nomads from the steppes of central Asia, made steady inroads into the more sophisticated world of the Muslim Arabs in the early eleventh century.

In 1055, the Seljuks captured Baghdad, destroying a long-lived Muslim dynasty and seriously disrupting the stability of the Middle East. This might have provided an opportunity for the Christian Byzantines to recover their lost provinces, but even as the Seljuk Turks conquered the Arabs, they converted to Islam. The Muslim Arab overlords of the region were thus replaced by harsher, coarser Muslim Turks.

Pleas from the East

In 1071 Byzantine Emperor Romanus Diogenes confronted a Turkish invasion force in the far eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire. The two armies met at the village of Manzikert, near Lake Van, and the Byzantines were utterly defeated. As a result of this disaster, the Byzantines lost all the territory that they had recovered, painstakingly, in the ninth and tenth centuries. This included the entirety of Asia Minor, the breadbasket and recruiting ground of the empire.

Succeeding Byzantine emperors sent frantic calls to the West for aid, directing them primarily at the popes, who were generally seen as protectors of Western Christendom. Pope Gregory VII received

these appeals first, and in 1074 he discussed leading a relief expedition to Byzantium himself. But this proved impractical, and no aid was offered. The Byzantines continued sending appeals, however, eventually finding an audience with Pope Urban II.

In the meantime, Turkish invasions continued to affect the Holy Land. Jerusalem, which was held by the Shi'ite Fatimid dynasty of Egypt, was captured by the Seljuk Turks in 1071. The Turks, suspecting (rightly or wrongly) that the local Christian population might prefer their former Fatimid rulers to the new overlords, persecuted them. In 1091, Turks drove out the Christian priests.

The Fatimids, meanwhile, bided their time. When the moment was right, they seized the city again—in 1098, just one year before the First Crusade would arrive to recapture it.

In 1095, the West finally responded to the plight of Eastern Christians by mounting the First Crusade. In 1099, crusaders stormed Jerusalem. Like the capture of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614, but unlike the negotiated surrender to the Muslims in 638, this attack ended in a bloody massacre of the city's inhabitants. "Heaps of heads and hands and feet were to be seen throughout the streets and squares of the city," a medieval historian wrote.

A Christian kingdom controlled much of the Holy Land until 1291, when the Muslims once again conquered the area. But the crusades themselves were military failures. Whatever battles Christians could claim, Muslims would win the war.

Islam strikes back

The recapture of Jerusalem by Christian forces in 1099 did not, at first, draw much notice from the Muslim world. A few poets wrote laments on its capture. Abu l-Muzaffar al-Abiwardi, an Iraqi poet, called for a response:

> ***Sons of Islam, behind you are battles in which heads rolled at your feet.***
>
> ***Dare you slumber in the blessed shade of safety, where life is as soft as an orchard flower? ...***
>
> ***This is war, and the man who shuns the whirlpool to save his life shall grind his teeth in penitence.***

The titular supreme ruler of the Islamic world, the caliph of Baghdad, also issued a statement of regret. But in general, local Muslim rulers adapted to the presence of the Christian rulers of the crusader states just as they had adapted to the intrusion of the Turks: here were new players on the stage of the Middle East.

Before long, that began to change. A series of Muslim rulers, including Zengi, Nur al-Din, and the famous Saladin, fought to reunite the fractured parts of the Islamic Middle East. These leaders initiated a ***jihad***, a counter-crusade against the Christians of Jerusalem and the surrounding regions. A desire to reconquer the city figured more and more notably in Muslim writings.

By the end of the twelfth century, Saladin had reconquered Jerusalem more or less permanently. The entire Holy Land was back under Islamic control by 1291.

Christians repeatedly tried to launch crusades to drive back the renewed Muslim assault, but these attempts all failed. Crusading was too difficult, dangerous, and costly. Besides, the growing kingdoms of Europe were more interested in their own affairs than they were in the fate of Jerusalem or of Eastern Christians.

Europe under siege

By the fourteenth century, a new Muslim force had appeared in Asia Minor: the Ottoman Turks. Brought into southern Europe by one side in a Byzantine civil war, the Ottomans quickly established a base from which to expand.

Christian Balkan powers began to fall before the Ottoman advance. Christian leaders like Prince Lazar of Serbia, John Hunyadi of Hungary, and the Albanian guerilla commander Skanderbeg put up a heroic resistance, but in vain. The drumbeat of Muslim advance had resumed.

Lazar was defeated and killed in the first battle of Kosovo in 1389. Bulgaria was overrun in 1393. John Hunyadi was defeated in 1448 at the second battle of Kosovo while trying to mount a campaign to save the beleaguered Byzantines, who by now were virtual prisoners inside their capital city of Constantinople.

Constantinople was sacked in May 1453. The last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, died in desperate fighting around the gates of the city.

Legend has it that an Orthodox priest was celebrating mass in the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) when Muslim troops broke in. He escaped by walking miraculously into the altar, from whence, according to the legend, he will return once Constantinople is Christian again.

The legend is doubtless just that. But no more Christian services were conducted in the cathedral—Hagia Sophia, like most of the other churches of Constantinople, was converted into a mosque.

Over the next 200 years, European strength grew to match, then exceed, Islamic power. European states also began to claim colonies around the globe. Muslims lost their grip on land-based Asian trade and never developed the naval technology to keep pace with Europeans at sea.

In 1683, the Ottomans launched a final attack on Europe, staging their second siege of Vienna (the first took place in 1529). Once again, the city seemed on the verge of falling. It was saved by what may have been the last true crusade.

A Polish force, led by Jan Sobieski, caught the Turks by surprise and relieved the siege. Sobieski also, it is said, brought coffee and croissants onto Western tables when he discovered the Turks' uneaten breakfasts in their tents.

Muslims made no more serious attempts to take the city, or any other territory in Europe. The Muslim world was slipping into a long period of decline from which it is only now emerging.

Crusades reconsidered

Though some Christians decried the crusades while they were happening (see page 28) and soon afterward (see page 31), anguish over this episode in history dates primarily from more recent years. In the early 1950s, at the end of his sweeping three-volume history of the crusades, Sir Steven Runciman put it this way: "The Crusades were a tragic and destructive episode. The Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost."

Muslims, too, have lately taken a darker view of the crusade era. Until relatively recently, they saw the battles as episodes in the long contest between Islam and Christianity—a contest initiated by

Islam. Now, statements like this, from Lebanese journalist Abin Maalouf in the 1980s, are more common: "[T]here can be no doubt that the schism between these two worlds [of Islam and Christianity] dates from the crusades, deeply felt by the Arabs, even today, as an act of rape."

In the late 1990s, an American child led a "Reconciliation Walk" across Europe and the Middle East, distributing hugs, apologies, and a written statement, saying, "We deeply regret the atrocities committed in the name of Christ by our predecessors" to the bemused Muslims he and his companions met along the way.

The child's activities fit into a larger pattern of Western amnesia about the conflict between Islam and Christianity, and of fashionable Western self-loathing. Muslims have offered no apologies. Some Muslim leaders still call the faithful to counter-crusade today, viewing themselves as continuing the tradition of Muslim conquest of Christian lands (though many of those lands have ceased to be Christian in any meaningful way). Muslims in general seem to have accepted the Christians' self-description as unjust aggressors.

But if Christians are allowed to wage war when attacked, and if Christians believe that their religion has a right to exist outside the sphere of Islamic law, perhaps modern Christians should take a second look at the crusades and their historical context, in which Christianity was under near-constant pressure from the Islamic world from the seventh century to the seventeenth.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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The Battle of Tours, 732

Four contemporary accounts paint two radically different pictures.

anonymous Arab chroniclers, Isidore of Beja, and St. Denis

Islamic

Near the river Owar [Loire], the two great hosts of the two languages and the two creeds were set in array against each other. The hearts of [Muslim leader] Abderrahman, his captains and his men were filled with wrath and pride, and they were the first to begin to fight. The Moslem horsemen dashed fierce and frequent forward against the battalions of the Franks, who resisted manfully, and many fell dead on either side, until the going down of the sun.

Night parted the two armies, but in the gray of the morning the Muslims returned to the battle. Their cavaliers had soon hewn their way into the center of the Christian host. But many of the Moslems were fearful for the safety of the spoil which they had stored in their tents, and a false cry arose in their ranks that some of the enemy were plundering the camp; whereupon several squadrons of the Moslem horsemen rode off to protect their tents. But it seemed as if they fled; and all the host was troubled.

And while Abderrahman strove to check their tumult, and to lead them back to battle, the warriors of the Franks came around him, and he was pierced through with many spears, so that he died. Then all the host fled before the enemy, and many died in the flight.

—anonymous Arab chronicler

Musa being returned to Damascus, the Caliph Abd-el Melek asked of him about his conquests, saying "Now tell me about these Franks—what is their nature?"

"They," replied Musa, "are a folk right numerous, and full of might: brave and impetuous in the attack, but cowardly and craven in event of defeat."

"And how has passed the war betwixt them and thyself? Favorably or the reverse?"

"The reverse? No, by Allah and the prophet!" spoke Musa. "Never has a company from my army been beaten. And never have the Moslems hesitated to follow me when I have led them; though they were twoscore to fourscore."

—anonymous Arab chronicler

Christian

For almost seven days the two armies watched one another, waiting anxiously the moment for joining the struggle. Finally they made ready for combat. And in the shock of the battle the men of the North seemed like a sea that cannot be moved. Firmly they stood, one close to another, forming as it were a bulwark of ice; and with great blows of their swords they hewed down the Arabs. ...

At last night sundered the combatants. The Franks with misgivings lowered their blades, and beholding

the numberless tents of the Arabs, prepared themselves for another battle the next day. ... Unaware that [the tents] were utterly empty, and fearful lest within the phalanxes of the Saracens were drawn up for combat, they sent out spies to ascertain the facts. These spies discovered that all the squadrons of the "Ishmaelites" had vanished. In fact, during the night they had fled with the greatest silence, seeking with all speed their home land.

The Europeans, uncertain and fearful, lest they were merely hidden in order to come back by ambushments, sent scouting parties everywhere, but to their great amazement found nothing. Then without troubling to pursue the fugitives, they contented themselves with sharing the spoils and returned right gladly to their own country.

—Isidore of Beja's Chronicle

The Muslims planned to go to Tours to destroy the Church of St. Martin, the city, and the whole country. Then came against them the glorious Prince Charles, at the head of his whole force. He drew up his host, and he fought as fiercely as the hungry wolf falls upon the stag.

By the grace of Our Lord, he wrought a great slaughter upon the enemies of Christian faith, so that—as history bears witness—he slew in that battle 300,000 men, likewise their king by name Abderrahman. Then was he [Charles] first called "Martel," for as a hammer of iron, of steel, and of every other metal, even so he dashed and smote in the battle all his enemies. And what was the greatest marvel of all, he only lost in that battle 1,500 men.

—The Chronicle of St. Denis

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3 Phases of Christian-Muslim Interaction: Christian History Timeline

Islamic Ascendancy

570 A Muhammad born

610 Gabriel calls Muhammad to be a prophet of Allah

622 Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina

632 Muhammad dies

638 Jerusalem surrenders to Muslim military

711 Muslims invade Spain

717 Caliph Umar II begins first general persecution of nonMuslims

726 John of Damascus leaves public office, enters monastery

732 Charles Martel defeats Muslim armies at Tours (Poitiers)

781 Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I debates Caliph Mahdi

807 Caliph Harun al-Rashid orders destruction of all newer churches

850 Caliph Mutawakkil forces Christians to wear yellow patches

956 Seljuk Turks embrace Islam

988 Prince Vladimir of Kiev adopts Christianity, stopping Islam's advance into Eastern Europe

1009 Fatimid Caliph Hakim destroys Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem

1025 Muslim raiders level a temple of Shiva in Gujarat, India

1055 Seljuk Turks capture Baghdad, ending a stable Islamic dynasty

1071 Byzantines lose major battle at Manzikert

1091 Seljuk Turks drive Christian priests out of Jerusalem

Crusades

1099 First Crusade recaptures Jerusalem

1118 Military Order of Knights Templar formed to protect Holy Land pilgrims

1147 German knights of Second Crusade suffer major defeat at Dorylaeum, in Asia Minor

1169 Saladin comes to power in Egypt

1187 Saladin's forces crush crusader army, take Jerusalem

1191 England's Richard the LionHeart negotiates access to Jerusalem

1204 Fourth Crusade sacks Constantinople, an allied city

1216 Jacques de Vitry named bishop of Acre

1219 Francis of Assisi preaches to Saladin's nephew

1238 Thomas Aquinas writes ***Summa Contra Gentiles***, an apologetic aimed at Islam

1244 Christian settlers forced out of Jerusalem

1261 Byzantines regain Constantinople

1291 Fall of Acre ends Christian power in Holy Land

Ottoman Rise and Fall

1300 Sultan Osman I founds Ottoman Empire in presentday Turkey

1315 Christian missionary Ramon Llull stoned by Muslim crowd in Algeria

1389 Christian Prince Lazar of Serbia defeated and killed at first Battle of Kosovo

1393 Muslim forces overrun Bulgaria

1453 Ottoman Turks take Constantinople

1492 Spanish capture Grenada, ending Reconquista

1509 Portuguese fleet sinks Muslim fleet in battle near India

1520 Sulaiman the Magnificent comes to power

1529 First Islamic siege of Vienna

1683 Second siege of Vienna

1736 First of many territorial wars with Russia

1854 Ottomans and Russians face off in Crimean War

1878 Ottomans lose Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Bulgaria due to Slavic uprising

1911 Italians win Libya

1915 Turks begin brutal campaign against Armenian Christians

1917 Balfour Declaration, backed by many Western Christians, proposes Jewish homeland

1919 Ottomans lose Syria, Palestine, Arabia, and Mesopotamia in Treaty of Versailles

1924 Kemal Ataturk abolishes caliphate, founds secular Republic of Turkey

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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Christians & Muslims: A Gallery of Spiritual Warriors

As their brethren attacked Muslim fortresses, these evangelistic crusaders fought for Muslim souls.

Steven Gertz

Trailblazing preacher
Francis of Assisi
1181-1226

Writing his first Rule in 1209, 27-year-old Francis called on his followers to preach to and convert Muslims: "Let any brother who desires by divine inspiration to go among the Saracens and other nonbelievers, go with the permission of his minister and servant."

Francis, a radical who had renounced his father's wealth to embrace a lifestyle of poverty and relentless preaching, sent his first missionary to one of the crusader states in Syria in 1217. Two years later, he commissioned six more men to go to Morocco. News eventually filtered back that five of the friars reached Morocco and began preaching in the streets, but they were decapitated by angry Muslims.

As the father of a growing order, the Friars Minor, Francis debated whether he should visit the war zone himself. Eventually he responded to a call from Pope Honorius III, who sought preachers to invigorate the soldiers of the Fifth Crusade.

In 1219 Francis set sail for Damietta, Egypt, where crusaders were besieging a Muslim fortress. While the battle raged, Francis hatched a plan to cross over the lines to try to convert Saladin's nephew, Sultan Malik al-Kamil.

The sultan's sentinels, thinking Francis and his companion Illuminato came with a message from the crusaders, ushered them directly into al-Kamil's presence.

When the sultan questioned them about their business, Francis answered, "We are telling you in all truth that if you die in the law which you now profess, you will be lost and God will not possess your soul. It is for this reason we have come."

The sultan's counselors called for the friars' execution. They told al-Kamil, "Lord, you are the sword of the law: you have the duty to maintain and defend it. We command you, in the name of Allah and of Muhammad, who has given us the law, to cut off their heads here and now, for we do not want to listen to anything they have to say."

At this, the sultan refused to listen to Francis, but neither would he kill him. "I am going to act against the law," he said, "because I am never going to condemn you to death. For that would be an evil reward for me to bestow on you, who conscientiously risked death in order to save my soul for God."

The sultan then offered them gifts and land, but Francis refused, and the sultan escorted them safely back across Christian lines.

The friar didn't stay long in Egypt, and after visiting the crusader city of Acre, he sailed for Italy, never to return. But his followers and indeed the whole of medieval Christianity treasured this tale of courage.

He inspired his order to send more missionaries.

Jacques de Vitry later wrote of the Franciscans, "Not only Christ's faithful but even the Saracens ... admire their humility and virtue, and when the brothers fearlessly approach them to preach, they willingly receive them and, with a grateful spirit, provide them with what they need."

Inquisitor and educator
Ramon de Penyaforte
ca. 1175-1275

Ramon de Penyaforte was a well bred and well known teacher of canon law at the University of Bologna when the "kidnapper of souls," Dominic de Guzman, came to town with a call to poverty. Ramon shocked his students and colleagues by leaving his position to return to Barcelona and join the Dominican order.

Ramon's arrival in Barcelona came at a strategic time. Across Spain, as Christian rulers took the offensive against Muslim forces, Dominicans followed them to convert both apostate Christians and devout Muslims. Pope Gregory IX asked Ramon to travel the country preaching the crusade against the Moors. Ramon was so effective that the pope called him back to Rome to serve as his confessor and, later, as inquisitor of heretics.

The new inquisitor keenly understood the need for a coherent response to Islam. When his colleagues appointed him to lead the Dominican order in May 1238, he encouraged fellow Dominican Thomas Aquinas to write an apology against the heretics' errors. The result was the formative ***Summa Contra Gentiles***. In it Aquinas used reason to convince Muslims of the truth of Christianity, since they refused Scripture's authority.

Ramon lost little time in training his order in Aquinas's apologetic. He secretly set up schools for missionaries in Tunis and Barcelona. His schools soon attracted interest. Friar Humbert de Romans wrote of them with glowing praise: "From Spain we learn that the Brethren, who for some years have given themselves up to the study of Arabic language, have made great progress, and what is still more praiseworthy is that they have converted Saracens, many of whom have already received Baptism."

For all his efforts, though, Ramon never accomplished what he set out to do. Some 30 years after Pope Honorius III authorized both Franciscans and Dominicans to evangelize the Moors of Spain and North Africa, Ramon could point to few Muslim leaders even leaning toward Christianity.

Crusader bishop
Jacques de Vitry
1160-1240

Jacques traveled a long road to the East. Born in France, he studied at the University of Paris, then sought out the mystic Marie d'Oignies, who encouraged him to preach. He soon won renown across Europe for his attacks on the heretical Albigenses. His reputation earned him an appointment, in 1216, as bishop of the crusader city of Acre.

As bishop, Jacques turned his attention to the conversion of another band of "heretics"—Muslims. In the spring of 1217, he undertook a preaching tour of the coastal region of Syria, which was then under crusader rule. To his delight, two Muslims converted and were baptized in the church of Tortosa.

Encouraged by this early success, Jacques traveled to the Christian-Muslim borderland to preach. But he soon found that most Muslims hesitated to embrace Christianity, for fear of retribution from other Muslims. So he aligned himself with the crusaders, reasoning that Muslims would dare to convert if

soldiers could protect them.

The plan failed. Sometimes the crusaders themselves obstructed his work. Soldiers commonly took Muslim captives, many of them children, as slaves. Jacques wanted to convert and baptize them, but under the laws of the crusader kingdoms, any Muslim who converted gained his or her freedom. Therefore, some crusaders refused to allow Jacques to come near their slaves, "although these [Muslims] earnestly and tearfully requested it."

By 1227, Jacques had given up and gone home. Crusader fortunes had reversed, and neither the conversion nor the defeat of the Muslims seemed likely.

Martyred mystic
Ramon Llull
(Raymond Lull)
1235-1315

Ramon Llull was born on the island of Majorca, off the coast of Spain. Decades before, King James II of Aragon had captured Majorca from the Moors. The king awarded land to his captains, including Llull's father. So Llull lived a privileged life, eventually rising to a position of overseeing the king's feasts. He also gained fame as one of the kingdom's finest poets.

But in July 1266, Llull saw a vision of Jesus on the cross, and his life changed dramatically. He quit writing amorous poetry and retired to a cell, where he spent the next nine years learning Arabic with his Muslim slave. A tragic fight that led to his slave's death strengthened his resolve to serve God and inspired his motto, "He who loves not lives not."

Around this time, Llull learned of Francis's visit to the sultan and discerned God's call on his life as a missionary to Muslims. As his father had wielded the sword as a soldier, he would wield the sword of the Spirit as a missionary.

A prolific writer, Llull wrote an astonishing 321 books in Latin, Catalan, and Arabic, many of which responded to Islamic challenges to Christianity. His ***Ars Major sive Generalis*** (1275) locked horns with Muslim philosophers Avicenna and Averroes on the grounds that Christianity was rational, an innovation in Muslim-Christian dialogue.

In his novel ***Blanquerna*** (1287), he outlined two methods of converting Muslims, one peaceful (preaching) and one violent (crusade). Llull appeared to have vacillated between them, though in his ***Llibre de Contemplacio en Deu*** (1273), he stated clearly that the Holy Land should be conquered not by force of arms, but "by love, prayers, and the shedding of tears and blood."

Llull did more than write—he labored to build schools that would train missionaries for service in Muslim lands. In 1276, he established his first school in Majorca, which taught not only theology and philosophy, but also Arabic and the geography of Islamic lands.

"The man unacquainted with geography," he wrote, "is not only ignorant where he walks but whither he leads. Whether he attempts the conversion of infidels or works for other interests of the Church, it is indispensable that he know the religions and environments of all nations."

His next step was to convince the papacy of his vision. But corrupt Nicholas IV and Boniface VIII took more interest in lining their pockets. Discouraged, the missionary decided to go to North Africa himself.

In 1291, 1307, and again in 1314, he talked with and preached to the ***ulema***, or Muslim literati.

Threatened, imprisoned, and banished twice, Llull would not be silenced. "Death has no terrors for a sincere servant of Christ who is laboring to bring souls to a knowledge of the truth," he told his captors.

Years before, he wrote in his ***Llibre de Contemplacio en Deu***, "Men are wont to die, O Lord, from old age ... but thus, if it be your will, your servant would prefer to die in the glow of love." On June 30, 1315, a Muslim mob granted his desire by stoning him to death in Bugia, Algeria.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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From Crusades to Homeland Defense

Martin Luther responded to Islam with a new military philosophy, fresh focus on the Qur'an, and provocative readings of biblical prophecy.

Gregory Miller

Ego usque ad mortem luctor adversus Turcas et Turcarum Deum," Martin Luther wrote. "I will always struggle to the death against the Turks and the god of the Turks."

Luther was not the only European of his era to fear a deadly battle with Islamic forces (i.e. Turks). During the reign of Sultan Sulaiman the Magnificent, 1520-1566, the Ottoman Empire reached its greatest geographical extent and the height of its military power. Throughout Europe pamphlets reported one Ottoman victory after another. As far away as England, the word "Turk" conjured images of surprise attack and invasion.

It is significant for the history of Christian-Islamic relations that the Ottoman Empire hit its peak as the Protestant Reformation got underway. Protestant reformers made many uncharitable statements about Islam, sometimes reflecting medieval prejudices more than sixteenth-century circumstances. Still, because of their theological orientation, reformers altered Christians' interpretation of Islam in ways that have shaped attitudes into the Modern period.

To fight or not to fight

Early in his career, Luther identified God's displeasure with the church as the real reason for the Ottomans' successes. In 1518 he asserted that "to fight against the Turk is to fight against God who is punishing our sins through them." When faced with Turkish aggression, Christians first must repent.

These statements produced unintended consequences. Some people erroneously interpreted Luther as advocating a position of non-resistance. Roman Catholics accused him of handing over Christians to the infidels. Pamphlets told stories of some who had, as a result, joined the Muslims, or "turned Turk."

Luther abhorred this reputation. His friends encouraged him to write a clarification of his increasingly embarrassing comments.

As critics attacked Luther, Turkish forces stepped up their attacks on Europe. At the battle of Mohac in 1526, Turks destroyed the entire Hungarian force in less than two hours. Sulaiman occupied Budapest and claimed a large portion of Hungary. In 1529 the Ottoman armies moved against central Europe in a campaign that culminated in a siege of Vienna.

Although forced to withdraw, Sulaiman gave every indication that the Ottoman armies would be back. Given the severity of the Turkish threat, Luther reported that the news of the siege of Vienna made him physically ill.

In his pamphlets ***On War Against the Turks*** (1529) and ***Military Sermon Against the Turks*** (1530), Luther clarified his position on the Christian response to Islam. Most significantly, he emphasized his absolute rejection of the crusade as a blasphemous confusion of the spiritual and the secular. Christians as Christians were not to lead or even participate in battle.

Further, he argued that ecclesiastical attempts at military leadership angered God. Clergy should preach and pray, not bear arms and fight. According to Luther, soldiers had a right to protest a church-led military crusade through disobedience.

"If I were a soldier and saw in the battlefield a priest's banner or cross, even if it were the very crucifix, I would run away as though the very devil were chasing me!" he wrote.

According to Luther, no religious cause justified military action against false Christians, heretics, or even Turks. Spiritual enemies must be fought with spiritual weapons alone. Crusade, or holy war, was never permissible.

This represents a significant departure from mainstream medieval theology. Since Pope Gregory the Great (died 604), theologians had argued that the coercion of those who held false beliefs was an appropriate cause of war.

Luther's criticism of crusades did not mean Christians could never use violence against the Turks, however. He wrote his ***Military Sermon*** specifically to admonish the "fist" against the Ottomans. But the fist belonged to political authorities, not to the church. Though Christians as ***Christians*** should never wage war, Christians ***as rulers*** sometimes must.

For Luther, the war against the Turks was his generation's example of a "good war." Legitimate rulers had a duty to defend society against the Turks, just as they would oppose all disturbers of the peace.

By extension, if called upon to give material or physical support to the military effort against the Turks, Christian subjects should give willingly. In the ***Military Sermon***, Luther warned:

> If you hold back and refuse to pay or to ride [in battle], look out—the Turk will teach you. ...[H]e won't demand taxes or military service from you, but instead attack your house and home ... stab you to death (if you are so lucky), shame or strangle your wife and daughter before your eyes, hack your children to death and impale them on the fenceposts. And, what is worst of all, you must suffer all this with a wicked, troubled conscience as a damned unchristian who has been disobedient to God and his government.

Limited respect

Luther viewed the Turks as terrifying but not purely evil. At times he praised them for their piety. He believed the discipline of the Turks would shame papists so much that none would remain in his faith if he were to spend just three days with the Turks.

In demonstrating the religious "superiority" of the Turks over the papists, though, Luther primarily wanted to highlight the emptiness of works-righteousness. In the end, Luther always used the same argument: no matter how spiritual a religion looks, all without Christ are lost.

Yet ambivalence in Lutheran comments about Muslim rule opened up new possibilities for the acceptance of the Ottoman Empire as a legitimate European state. Luther recognized that, despite fabled ruthlessness, the Turks were admirably efficient governors. Strictly enforced order was better, in his mind, than no order at all.

Luther's strong emphasis on obedience to authority also influenced his advice to Christians taken captive by Turks. He admonished them to obey their captors at all points—unless called upon to kill fellow believers. He even suggested that this approach might save Muslims as well as Christians. Citing

the biblical examples of Joseph and Daniel, Luther wrote that obedient Christian captives stood a better chance of converting Muslims than did professional missionaries, Scripture, or preaching.

A foul, useful book

As early as 1529, Luther lamented that he had no accurate Latin translation of the Qur'an. About this time the Zürich reformer Theodor Bibliander initiated his study of Arabic with the intention of publishing the first-ever typeset Qur'an.

By 1542 Bibliander had completed his edition, but public fear that the Qur'an might threaten the Christian community jeopardized the entire project. All printed copies were seized, and the printer was jailed. Several Protestant leaders across confessional lines (including Luther, who added an introduction to the text) intervened, and the printing was allowed to continue. Luther supported the publication of the Qur'an in Latin because he considered the public knowledge of the Qur'an to be the greatest weapon against Islam.

Access to the Qur'an encouraged new interpretations. Luther's understanding is typical of much early Protestant thought. He viewed the Qur'an to be fundamentally a law book, not on a par with the Bible, but similar to the papal collections of canon (church) law. Yet whatever disagreements Luther had with canon law, he had much worse to say about the Qur'an, which he called a "foul, shameful book."

Luther judged the Qur'an to contain human wisdom without God's inspiration: "For [Muhammad's] law teaches nothing other than what human reason can easily bear. What he found in the Gospel that was too difficult or lofty to believe, he left out, particularly that Christ is God and that he has saved us through his death."

Yet behind these pronouncements on the shamefulness of the Qur'an is an important re-engagement with the Muslim holy book and with Arabic. The Renaissance battle cry ***ad fontes*** ("back to the source") echoes here, in the impulse to examine texts in their original languages.

This interest in Arabic eventually resulted in the first chairs in Arabic at European universities. These scholars gradually accomplished what no one had managed during the Middle Ages: a stripping away of fantastic legends about Muhammad and Islam.

The role that the ***sola scriptura*** principle played in Protestant interpretations of Islam led to a view of Islam as fundamentally a religion of works-righteousness. For Luther, Islam is so strongly stamped by "works" that every works-righteousness system could be called "Turkish."

In sharp contrast to most medieval critics of Islam, Luther demonstrated a complete lack of interest in the life of Muhammad. Lurid, pseudo-biographies on Muhammad were available for anti-Muslim polemic, but Luther chose instead to focus on the Qur'an and its laws and doctrines.

Islam and the End Times

Comparing their world to Scripture, Lutherans believed that they were living in the last days. The Turks played an important role in this interpretation.

Because the end of the world is near, Lutherans argued, the devil rages with his two weapons: the antichrist (the papacy) and the Turks. "The Turks are certainly the last and most furious raging of the devil against Christ ... after the Turk comes the judgment," Luther wrote.

Lutherans interpreted both Daniel and Revelation as prophecies that the Turks would be allowed dominion for a time, but then would be destroyed from on high.

The Turks entered the interpretation of Daniel in chapter 7. Muhammad and his faith rose as the little horn amid the ten horns on the fourth beast. The eyes of the horn are Muhammad's Qur'an, "In whose law there is no divine eye, but mere human reason without God's word and spirit." The mouth that speaks blasphemous things is Muhammad, exalting himself over Christ.

The book of Revelation also offered insights on the contemporary situation. Luther understood Gog and Magog, in chapter 20, as the biblical designation for the Turks. This was such an important point for him that he published his translation of Ezekiel 38 and 39 as a separate pamphlet with an introduction underscoring the connection.

From Luther to today

An important long-term consequence of Luther's view of Islam was that an eschatological interpretation of Islam was built into the very foundation of Protestantism. A close identification of Christian-Islamic conflict with an End Times confrontation between God and the devil has remained very influential (though various Protestants have nominated many other antichrists over the centuries as well).

Luther also changed the politics of Christian-Islamic relations. First, he recast the military response to Islam from a crusade to a defensive war to protect the homeland. This distinction still shapes Western thought.

Further, Luther's writings contain the seeds of an admission that the Turks were a God-permitted authority who deserved the obedience of their subjects, even the Christian ones. This would lead European countries to accept the Ottoman Empire and later influence Western attitudes toward Islamic successor states.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 74: Christians & Muslims

Four Jihads

Jihad means more than warfare, but the sword is central to Islam's texts, its history, and its founder.

Mateen A. Elass

Recently terrorist activities by purportedly Muslim groups have increased debate over the place of violence in true Islam. Moderate Muslims say violence has no place, because Islam is a religion of peace. In their minds, it is as unfair to judge Islam by extremists as it would be to judge Christianity only by the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Puritan witch hunts.

Is such a comparison reasonable? Does it do justice to the canonical teachings of both religions? The answer to these questions is found at least partly in a study of the Islamic concept of ***jihad*** and its lack of a full counterpart in Christian orthodoxy.

Spiritual jihad

The word ***jihad*** is often translated as "holy war," but it literally means "struggle" or "exertion." In its religious context, it always involves a fight against evil, but this can take many forms: jihad of the heart, of the mouth and pen, of the hand, and of the sword. Jihad of heart, mouth, and pen are sometimes spoken of as "spiritual jihad," particularly among the Shi'ites (the largest Islamic minority party, comprising roughly 10 percent of the Muslim world).

All Muslims must engage in jihad of the heart, which finds a rough parallel in the Christian command to put to death the sin nature. Muhammad clearly commanded his followers to fight their sinful tendencies, as did Jesus. Islam, though, offers no assistance in this struggle from the Holy Spirit, the counselor and guide promised to Christians.

Jihad of the mouth aims to undermine opposition to Islam through speech that takes one of two forms. The first, verbal argumentation, finds a Christian parallel in the discipline of apologetics. The second, curses and saber-rattling, has roots in pre-Islamic Arabia, where the art of extemporaneous imprecatory poetry was prized as a means of verbal jousting between warring tribes.

Generally, a war of words is considered preferable to one of physical violence. Muslims still employ this tactic. When Saddam Hussein bragged before the Gulf War that coalition troops were facing "the mother of all battles," he was engaging in a jihad of the mouth.

Jihad of the pen applies the written word to Islam's defense. Over the last thirteen centuries, much Islamic ink has presented Muhammad as the ultimate prophet of God and his message as the perfect will of Allah for all humanity. The central doctrines of the Christian faith, though sadly misunderstood by many Muslim scholars, have been the special target of Islamic apologetics.

Jihad of the hand seeks to promote the cause of Allah through praiseworthy deeds. Muslims' exemplary treatment of others and devotion to God are supposed to prove the superiority of their message and serve as a vehicle for the proclamation of their beliefs.

Christians also embrace the concept of jihad of the hand. As Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, "Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words."

"Lesser" jihad

The last and most troublesome form of jihad is that of the sword. This aspect dominates Islamic history and jurisprudence.

When the word ***jihad*** occurs in the Qur'an without any modifier, or with the typical modifier "in the cause of Allah," it invariably refers to the call to physical combat on behalf of Islam. It is often linked with the word ***qital*** (fighting) in the context of dealing with unbelievers.

Some modern Muslims downplay this understanding, arguing that in Islamic tradition war is called the "lesser jihad." Indeed, according to one disputed tradition from the ***hadith*** (the collection of texts concerning Muhammad's actions or statements, second only to the Qur'an in authority), when Muhammad returned from the field of war he said, "We have all returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad."

Some companions asked, "What is the greater jihad, O prophet of God?"

He replied, "Jihad against the desires."

Presumably the jihad of the heart is greater because it is unceasing, whereas the jihad of the sword continues only as long as there are unbelievers unwilling to submit to the rule of Islam. Nonetheless, this tradition demonstrates that Muhammad engaged in military jihad, and he commanded his followers to engage in it as well.

Doctrines of war

The Qur'an contains seemingly contradictory teachings on jihad of the sword. Islamic scholars, however, note that Muhammad's teaching on jihad developed over time as the circumstances of his growing community changed. This accounts for the seeming contradictions, which actually describe four distinct stages of development.

First, when Islam was a fledgling movement and Muhammad endured persecution from his extended tribe in Mecca, he counseled his small band to engage in a policy of peaceful persuasion. Sura (chapter) 16:125-6 declares, "Invite [all] to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. ... But if you show patience, that is indeed the best [course] for those who are patient."

Many Muslims today regard this as the proper approach for the Muslim community any time it finds itself an overwhelmed minority in an unreceptive host culture.

When Muhammad fled Mecca in 622 (the ***Hegira***) to the friendlier confines of Medina, followers still in Mecca faced serious threats of property loss and bodily harm. This antipathy arose in response to the prophet's attacks on the Meccan caravan trade—the primary means by which Muhammad financed his mission.

Muhammad subsequently decreed that fighting was permissible only to ward off aggression and reclaim property confiscated by infidels. So, for example, Sura 22:39 says, "To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to fight], because they are wronged, and verily, God is most powerful for their aid. [They are] those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, [for no cause] except that they say, 'Our Lord is God.'"

Within a few months, this permission to fight in self-defense became a religious obligation to battle those who initiated hostilities against the Muslim community or its interests. "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out. ... But if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith" (2:190-194).

As the doctrine of jihad developed, Muhammad taught that those who sacrificed their lives in battle for the cause of God would be guaranteed admission to the highest level of heaven—no small reward in a religion where one's hope of heaven otherwise depends on near perfect obedience to divine law.

Conversely, those able-bodied Muslims who refused the call would suffer divine punishment (9:38-9). Not surprisingly, the number of Muslim men willing to commit their lives to warfare surged from this point on.

The third stage of development moved jihad from defense to offense. Muslims were told to take the initiative in war but to refrain from attacks during the four sacred months, which were recognized by all tribes within the Arabian peninsula as months for religious pilgrimage.

"When the forbidden months are past," the Qur'an declares, "then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush. But if they repent, perform the prayers and give alms, then leave their way free" (9:5).

The final development of the Qur'anic concept of jihad removed any limitations on the timing of battle in the cause of Allah. When commanded by a recognized Muslim leader, Muslims could attack non-believers in any season and on any land not yet surrendered to the armies of Islam. The famous Sura 9:29 (see page 18) lays out this ambitious plan.

Applying the law

Which of these stages is meant to be normative for Islam?

According to standard Islamic jurisprudence, it is the fourth—expansionist jihad, understood as armed struggle against unbelievers, whether or not the Muslim community has been attacked. The law of abrogation in Qur'anic hermeneutics (see Suras 2:106; 13:39; 16:103), in which later revelation always trumps earlier texts, affirms this.

Islamic history bears out this expansionist bent. One century after the appointment of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, Islam had become an empire reaching across North Africa up to Spain in the west and across Asia into India in the east. By the end of the next century (the second century ***Anno Hegirae***), Muslim territorial conquests had peaked, and Islamic jurisprudence had fully defined the behaviors and conditions governing "holy war."

The terms of jihad closely parallel Augustine's "just war" conditions. Only proper government authorities can conduct jihad. Fighting must avoid harming non-combatants, hostages, prisoners, and property (especially trees and landscape), and its ultimate goal must be to secure justice and peace.

For Islam, however, the causes of justice and peace are synonymous with the advance of the Muslim state, for politics and spirituality are inextricably bound together in the dream of one world under the complete dominion of Allah and His followers. So whereas Christian "just war" principles do not support the notion of establishing the kingdom of God by force, the Islamic doctrine of jihad unapologetically does.

When the ***ummah*** (community or state) of Islam faces its history of coercion and expansion, there is no

shame or repentance. Islam, unlike Christianity, teaches in its most authoritative sources that force is justifiable in the cause of Allah. Far from feeling regret over past conquests, Islam takes pride in this heritage.

Indeed, many Muslims look back on the first three centuries of Islam as the golden years of their heritage and long for a return to world ascendancy.

Tales of two founders

The actions of Jesus and Muhammad show the stark contrast in founding principles between their two religions.

When Jesus is arrested at the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples grab their swords. Peter strikes off the ear of one opponent. Jesus immediately commands his followers to stand down and declares that violence is not the appropriate means to accomplish the Father's will.

According to Matthew 26:53, Jesus claims that, should he want to win a military victory, he could easily call on his Father, "who will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels." Instead, rebellion is met with love, animosity with forgiveness.

While hanging on the cross, he prays for those who have wronged him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Love for enemies, sacrifice for their well-being, is the way of Jesus.

According to Sahih al-Bukhari (4:280b), one of several similar stories about Muhammad reads thus: "Anas bin Malik said, 'Allah's Apostle entered (Mecca) in the year of the conquest (of Mecca) wearing a helmet over his head. After he took it off, a man came and said, 'Ibn Khatal [a pagan opponent] is clinging to the curtains of the ka'ba [a recognized behavior for seeking mercy]. The Prophet said, 'Kill him.'"

While there is certainly room for debate over how well Christians and Muslims have followed the teachings of their respective leaders, there is no doubt about the contrasting visions of Jesus and Muhammad for how God's kingdom should be advanced. Just war theory has played a relatively minor role in the spread of Christianity across the globe. Jihad has been at the heart of Islam's expansion.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 74: Christians & Muslims

Divided by Christ

Whether Christians under early Muslim rule used polemic or polite dialogue to defend their faith, they hit an impasse at the Incarnation.

Samuel Hugh Moffett

Christians who lived under Muslim rule in the eighth century found themselves with an unusual status—second-class but sometimes respected, more often pitied for their "inferior" religion than directly persecuted. This led to some interesting debates.

Then, as now, some Christians cast the discussion in confrontational terms, while others opted for measured interfaith dialogue. The ways in which John of Damascus (ca. 675-749) and Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (779-823 or 778-821) approached Islam highlight the contrast.

(Note: Nestorianism, which rejected the complete blending of Christ's human and divine natures, was denounced at the 431 Council of Chalcedon. Despite this apparent deviation from orthodox Christianity, Patriarch Timothy presents the faith clearly in his debate with the caliph.)

Polemic Contrasts

John of Damascus, like his father and grandfather before him, held a position of honor in the local Muslim government. But for reasons unknown, in about 726 he retired from public office and entered the great monastery of Mar Saba (St. Sabas) near Jerusalem.

While there he wrote the ***Fount of Knowledge***, a massive work that contained a section "On Heresies." Here we find his judgment against Islam, which he viewed not as a new religion but as a heretical schism from Christianity. He also viewed Islam as a threat—while he was writing ***Fount of Knowledge***, a nearby bishop was executed for preaching against Islam.

John begins with the unequivocal statement, "There is also the superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the Antichrist."

Although John does not soften his language, he does at least credit Muhammad with leading his people from idolatry to monotheism, to the "One God, creator of all, who has [not] been begotten ... " Then the argument quickly resumes.

John was no gentle compromiser. He was severely careful (and was usually successful) neither to distort Muslim teaching nor to paint it any more Christian than it actually was.

He finished the sentence above with the complete Islamic formula: "who has neither been begotten nor has begotten," thereby clearly relating all his criticisms to the basic theological difference between Islam and Christianity, namely Christology.

John's subsequent arguments are subsidiary: the lack of reference to Muhammad's prophethood in the Bible (which Muslims accept as revelation); the impossibility of separating God from his Word and his Spirit; the defense of Christian veneration of the cross as no more an idolatry than the Muslim veneration of the ***ka'ba***; and criticisms of Muslim polygamy.

All these are lesser differences. To John, the crucial difference is this: the God of the Muslims is not the Christian God. Allah had no son. John's God is the Father of Jesus Christ.

Polite distinctions

Patriarch Timothy took a more moderate approach in his dialogue with Abbasid caliph Mahdi a generation later. The all-powerful caliph invited the argument himself, and, considering the times and the situation, both patriarch and caliph displayed remarkable tolerance and courtesy.

As the patriarch later recorded the proceedings, he had scarcely finished the customary complimentary address when the caliph "did something to me which he had never done before; he said to me, 'O Catholicos, [how can] a man like you who possesses all this knowledge and utters such sublime words concerning God, ... [say that God] married a woman from whom He begat a Son.'"

Thus, as bluntly as when John of Damascus 40 years earlier wrote against Islam, the arguments began again on the subject of Christology.

But Timothy was no polemicist, and times had changed. He coolly agreed that the statement was a blasphemy: "Who would say such a thing?" Nevertheless, he continued, "Christ is the Son of God"—not, however, "in the carnal way." And the debate went on for two days.

The arguments ranged from how God could have a son and how he could die, to the mathematical contradiction involved in the doctrine of the Trinity; and from Muslim claims of Muhammad's supreme prophethood to their charges that Christians had corrupted their own Scriptures.

On the second day, the caliph asked the most sensitive question of all. "What do you say about Muhammad?" One can almost sense the tense silence in the room as all wondered how the Christian from the ***dhimmi***s would answer his Muslim king.

Whereas John of Damascus brusquely described Muhammad as "a false prophet," Timothy managed to combine polite diplomacy with Christian integrity.

The patriarch noted the good that Muhammad had accomplished: he "taught the doctrine of the unity of God, ... drove his people away from bad works and brought them nearer to the good ones, ... separated his people from idolatry and polytheism, and attached them to the cult and the knowledge of one God."

The caliph said, "If you [only] accepted Muhammad as a prophet, your words would be beautiful and your meanings fine."

The patriarch, equally courteous, compared the Gospel to a precious pearl and closed with this prayer for the caliph: "May God grant to us that we may ... share [the pearl of the faith] with you."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 74: Christians & Muslims

Imperial Evasion

When the West finally gained influence in the Islamic world, Christians lost their nerve.

Andrew F. Walls

In the nineteenth century meeting with the Islamic world, Europe, while sometimes changing its mind, believed it already knew all that was necessary. Thus Western thought frequently engaged, not in a debate with Islam, but in internal debates about Islam.

On the topic of nineteenth-century Africa, these debates focused less on comparative religion that on colonial policy. One of the initiators was Reginald Bosworth Smith, a Harrow schoolmaster who knew no Arabic, had no cross-cultural experience, and was no great theologian.

Nearly all of Smith's writing has a single theme: the responsibilities attached to British imperial power. Patriotism allied to moral earnestness sounds through his work—including his strangely influential ***Mohammed and Mohammedanism*** (1874).

His desire is that British power, beneficent in intent, shall be beneficent in reality. To act in the right way is to act in the Christian way, and Britain is a Christian country. Indeed, he declares that Christianity is the birthright of the English.

To this Smith adds a cheerful evolutionism. He arrives at a formulation whereby all religions are moral, rather than theological, in origin. They have come into existence to meet social and national moral needs. They raise humanity gradually toward God.

Following Smith's theory of the origins of religions, one can readily acknowledge that Islam established righteousness at the time of its birth. For instance, while Christians commonly complain of the depressive effect of Islam on women, it can be shown that Muhammad significantly ***raised*** the status of women in early Arabia.

But the theory can go further. Islam can still establish righteousness today, whenever it encounters a people at a lower stage of development than itself. Without, therefore, giving up the idea of the superiority of Christianity, and even leaving open the possibility that Muslims will eventually see the need for a higher ethical norm, Islam can be seen as Christianity's ally in the task of raising humanity.

This is not, of course, the vision of missionary Christianity. Smith's vision is that of birthright Christianity, the fortunate inheritance of Britain. As imperial expansion brought British rule to more and more peoples where Islamic influence was already at work or at hand, Smith's book could be read as a tract for the times. The expansion of Islam might actually improve the lot of "native peoples."

That was not to say that Islam was true, and certainly not to say that it had any relevance to Western society. All questions of truth claims could be bypassed; the administrative convenience was that Islam was, or could be, socially elevating.

Christianity's failures

Smith's views were enthusiastically endorsed by the Afro-West Indian man of letters Edward Wilmot

Blyden, who wrote with the authority of one who had been a Christian missionary. He could give Bosworth Smith's argument a new dimension, detailing on the one hand the baleful effects in Africa of a Christianity heavily imbued with Western values, and on the other the blessings already brought to Africa by Islam.

Islam had brought unity instead of tribal division. It had kept foreign influence at bay. It had provided a basis for economic and cultural progress. It had harmed the African psyche less than Christianity had, for Western color prejudice and the imposition of Western cultural norms had confused African Christians and inhibited African artistic expression.

Further, Islam was less materialistic than Christianity. In colonial society an African had little to gain by becoming a Muslim, but everything to gain by connecting with the mission-dominated education system.

"I believe," Blyden wrote, "that Islam has done for vast tribes of Africa what Christianity in the hands of Europeans has not yet done. It has cast out the demons of fetishism, general ignorance of God, drunkenness, and gambling, and has introduced customs which subserve the highest purposes of growth and preservation. I do not believe that a system which has done such things can be outside God's beneficent plans for the evolution of humanity."

As a rhetorician, Blyden outpaces Smith, but it was Smith who haunted missionary writers and speakers for a generation to come. And their concern was not usually with his facile theology, but with his sociology. This sociology appealed to a great deal of the educated British public, whose opinions created the climate in which administrative decisions were made.

New doors closed

The growing empires of the Western powers collided with Islam from West Africa to East Asia. The foremost ruler of the world's Muslims was no longer the sultan of Turkey but Queen Victoria. The Royal Republic of the Netherlands also claimed vast numbers of Muslim subjects, and the twentieth century was to bring a time when, with the caliphate collapsed and Turkey secular, the emir of Afghanistan was almost the only genuinely independent Muslim ruler left in the world.

Thus most of the Muslim world passed under the rule or dominance, of powers that had always been considered Christian. But, despite the optimism of some missionary commentators, this did not usher in a great new era of accessibility.

Indeed, the colonial powers were sometimes more efficient at gatekeeping than the sultan had been. There seemed now good reasons why public policy should control the access of missions, not only to areas that were Islamic, but also to areas in which Islamic influence was, or might soon be, at work.

The era of imperial expansion is, of course, the era of missionary revival. Hundreds of new missionaries from the West pushed the frontiers of mission forward, seeking—in the eloquent title of a popular series of books at the time—the Conquests of the Cross. As regards Africa, the idea developed of a race with Islam, a competition for the peoples of the continent.

And what appeared to the mission constituency to stand in the way was the colonial administration, so tender of Islamic susceptibilities, it seemed, and so misled by the spirit of Bosworth Smith about the social effects of Islam, that it encouraged Muslim expansion and hindered Christian conversion. In the race for the soul of Africa, Christianity must contend with handicaps and heavy weights imposed by the administrative policies of Christian countries.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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Christians & Muslims: Christian History Interview - Justice and Peace

Because broken promises fueled Islamic militancy, the road to stability must be paved with good faith.

conversation with J. Dudley Woodberry

For all the Western media talks about the "Arab street," most of us can scarcely imagine what that world is really like. Fuller Seminary professor J. Dudley Woodberry knows. Since 1957, he has studied, taught, and ministered in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, and he has visited 35 other predominately Muslim countries. We asked him to describe how Muslims view history, society, and the West.

This issue looks at turning points in Christian-Muslim relations from a Christian perspective. How might a Muslim history read differently? Would Muslims focus on the same events?

Their history would be similar in many ways, although obviously what might be an "up" for us might be a "down" for them. It would depend on the type of Muslim, because that which creates hostility would be a "down" for many Muslims as well as for Christians. Both groups are looking for good relations without giving up their evangelistic mandates.

There would, however, be significant differences. For example, last summer I was asked by a Muslim theological faculty in Turkey to gather a group of Christian scholars for a dialogue on topics including the Crusades. Most of us don't feel at all responsible for the Crusades. We're very individualistic in the West, and we just weren't around back then. But we apologized twice for what the Crusades did not only to Islam, but also to the region that is now Turkey. And we practically got a standing ovation for that. Quite obviously, with their sense of group responsibility and trauma, that's a much a bigger issue for them than for us.

Then there's the colonial period, which most Westerners would not think of as a Christian invasion. With our sense of the separation of church and state, we see colonialism as political. But for many Muslims, colonization represented a crusading spirit that also manifested itself as support for Zionism and Israel. Such feelings have been obvious in the statements of Osama bin Laden and even of some Palestinians recently.

Does Islam always link what we would consider the religious and the political?

The overwhelming majority of Muslims see Islam as a total way of life. Of course, many Muslims today, because of a pluralistic world or because in some regions they are a minority, know they're going to have to emphasize the religious aspects and not be bound by some of the seventh-century political ideas of Islam.

But in general, Muslims view the separation Americans make between church and state as an unhealthy one. They would even point to the breakdown in morality that we have here as evidence of what happens when you take religion out of the other arenas of life.

What, then, would Muslims see as the ideal political and religious system?

Well, you have more than one point of view. The Islamist or fundamentalist view is that all of the answers are in the Qur'an and in the practice of Muhammad and the early Muslim community. If we just return to that, we'll be all right.

Conservatives would join with the fundamentalists in looking backward. By conservatives I mean those who focus on the adaptations of the first 300 years of Islam. In that time the four major schools of Sunni law and Shi'ite law were established, Shari'ah law was developed, and the major schools of theology were in place. Conservatives would say the adaptations were enough, and if we just return to those, everything will be all right.

Others realize that fundamentalists and conservatives oversimplify things. These Muslims still idealize Muhammad and the era of Islamic dominance and culture during the Abbasid Period [750-1258], but they understand that we've got to live in the modern world. They attempt to retain and emphasize the values of that early period, as they remember it or have reconstructed it, within modern legal systems and pluralistic nations.

One of the values of early Islam was aggressive expansionism. What do non-fundamentalist Muslims make of that?

What you see in the early expansion, particularly of the first hundred years, was the extension of Islamic military and political power. There was not much forced conversion at that time.

The goal was to establish an ambiance that favored conversion, and conversion indeed followed during the next couple of hundred years, from North Africa to the Indus River. Although there were jihads in Africa and elsewhere, Islam was largely carried by the trader or the Sufi, or mystic, missionary.

Now, if Larry Poston is right in his book ***Islamic Da'Wah in the West***, Muslims reversed this strategy in Europe and North America, seeking to evangelize first. Then, with enough converts, an ambiance would be created that would make it possible for Islam to have more political control. Many Muslims, though, realize that this is not at all likely to work in the West, so they are not trying to follow through with it.

What is being preached in mosques today, in North America and elsewhere?

Unfortunately there is a lot of anti-Western, and in some cases anti-Christian, preaching going on. Islam has been radicalized because of the sense of injustice in American policy on a number of issues, most crucially Palestine. But even in the Iraqi situation, where we focused on the weapons of mass destruction, what the Arabs and Muslims see on al-Jazeera television are the children who have died in the last 10 years from inadequate medicine and food.

With that sense of injustice, we're getting a lot of preaching, particularly in Muslim majority countries, against the West and against Christianity, as it is associated with the West. In this country, we're getting a much broader spectrum, because we have some Muslim leaders who are working very hard for reconciliation and understanding.

The more there's the sense of injustice, the more the preaching in the mosques of the Muslim world takes on a militant flavor. We often forget that militancy is directly related to a sense of trauma in the Muslim community.

As long as there's a sense of being threatened by the West, or by secularization, or by injustice, there's going to be militancy. We trace this through history quite easily. Conversely, the more that there's a sense of justice, the less there's going to be militancy.

So there have been times when the Muslim world perceived the West as being just?

Oh yes, very much so. Right up until the creation of Israel, the United States had a good reputation in the Middle East. That wasn't true for other Western countries, though.

In the Husain-McMahon correspondence at the beginning of World War I, the Arabs were told that if they sided with the Allies against their Turkish masters, who had sided with Germany, they would get independence. One year later, Sykes-Picot Agreement divided the Middle East between the British, the French, and the Russians (the Russians got cut out of it, so it ended up being just the British and French).

And then you have the Balfour Declaration, which says the British government would look with favor upon the creation of the national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, as long as this did not in any way interfere with the rights of the local inhabitants.

Both the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration violated the earlier agreement with the Arabs. From then on Muslims began to express anti-British sentiment, and anti-French, as the French took control of what's now Syria and Lebanon.

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson did not have colonial aspirations, and America chose not to participate in the League of Nations' post-war division of conquered lands. Christian schools and hospitals throughout the Middle East, northern India (now Pakistan), and Iran also prompted positive attitudes toward the United States.

Then, at the end of World War II, Harry Truman violated Franklin Roosevelt's promise to Abdul Aziz, the king of Saudi Arabia, not to do anything on Palestine without consulting the Arabs. The United States gave major support, in the United Nations and elsewhere, for Israel. That's when Americans became the bad guys in the Arab view.

Ever since, Muslims have had a bittersweet attitude toward the United States. They see our humanitarian activities, but Palestine is such a big issue for them that it really overrides everything else.

Do you see any hope for defusing Islamic militancy and stabilizing relations between the West and Islam?

I see a hope, and I know it will come, if it comes, from an increased sense in the Muslim world of not being in trauma, of not being treated unjustly. As Micah says, "What does the Lord require? He requires justice."

The Islamic world will notice if we are really looking for justice as well as peace, and if we are willing to lean on the Israelis as well as the Palestinians to make changes and come to a resolution. Whatever our views of eschatology, we should not be supporting things that in any other part of the world we might consider unjust.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 74: Christians & Muslims

Christians & Muslims: Recommended Resources

editors

Because the topic of Christian-Muslim relations is so broad, this issue will likely raise as many questions as it answers. Here are some suggestions for further exploration.

General Introductions

Scholar Bernard Lewis deserves the distinction, noted in the ***New York Times Book Review***, as "the doyen of Middle Eastern studies." He writes critically but fairly of Islam, avoiding the unfounded optimism of authors such as John Esposito, Karen Armstrong, and Jane Smith and of media packages such as PBS's ***Islam: Empire of Faith***. Lewis's recent articles in ***The Atlantic Monthly*** (see www.theatlantic.com) introduce his main ideas, which receive fuller treatment in his most popular non-specialist titles: ***Islam and the West*** (1994), ***The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years*** (1995), and ***What Went Wrong: Western Impact and the Middle Eastern Response*** (2001).

Though an able guide, Lewis does not address Islam from a Christian perspective. Useful, general-audience resources that do represent this perspective include James A. Beverley's ***Understanding Islam***, from the Nelson Quick Guide to Religions series (2001); George W. Braswell, Jr.'s ***Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power***, from Broadman & Holman (1996); Ravi Zacharias's ***Light in the Shadow of Jihad***, from Multnomah (2002); and ***The World of Islam*** CD-ROM, from Global Mapping International (2001; see www.gmi.org).

Lastly, for a fantastic collection of primary source documents, scholarly works, and other links, see Paul Halsall's Internet Islamic History Sourcebook, www.fordham.edu/ halsal/islam/islamsbook.html .

Provocative Landmarks

The West has lacked a consensus attitude toward Islam for decades. As a result, the landscape of literature on the topic features crags of controversy amid plains of more moderate offerings. It's helpful to know where the crags stand, because so much of the field is oriented around them.

Sir Steven Runciman's three-volume ***A History of the Crusades*** (1951-54) damns the Christian combatants while depicting Muslims as innocent and heroic victims. Far too many Westerners accept this assessment unquestioningly. The April 8, 2002, cover story of ***U.S. News & World Report***, for example, purporting to offer "The truth about the epic clash between Christianity and Islam," parroted Runciman without any reference to dissenting opinions.

In ***Orientalism*** (1979), Edward W. Said, one of the founders of post-colonial studies, argues that the West fabricated an image of the Eastern "other" in order to conquer and dominate the Islamic world. Subsequent efforts to describe Islam on its own terms, without even a whiff of judgment, follow in Said's wake.

One writer who has not followed Said's lead is Bat Ye'or, author of ***The Dhimmi*** (1985) and ***The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*** (1996). Ye'or (the name

is a pseudonym for an Egyptian-born Jewish scholar) attacks Islam's fabled religious tolerance by documenting harsh practices and policies directed at nonMuslim minority populations since the seventh century. Arguments and counter-arguments continue to swirl in the dust she kicked up, though the fable seems to be holding fairly firm.

Evangelism & Apologetics

This issue aimed to describe the history of ChristianMuslim contact, not prescribe a Christian response to Islam. For perspectives on this crucial issue, see:

James Dretke, ***A Christian Approach to Muslims*** (William Carey Library, 1979)

Phil Parshall, ***New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*** (Baker, 1980)

Martin Goldsmith, ***Islam & Christian Witness*** (IVP, 1982)

J. Dudley Woodberry, ***Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*** (MARC, 1989)

The Muslim-Christian Debate, www.debate.org.uk/

Answering Islam, www.answering-islam.org

—The editors