

Islam & Christianity: The First Millennium

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Islam & Christianity – The First Millennium

This is the tale of two of the world's foremost and seeming disparate religions – Islam and Christianity. In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent emergence of what has often appeared to be religiously inspired terrorism, the chasm between Christian and Muslim has perhaps never seemed wider.

We often forget that both religions can be traced to a single spiritual if not genealogical ancestor – Father Abraham. Both Islam and Christianity are inextricably linked to even older religious tradition of Judaism. All three traditions point the way to a single God – or Allah. And the history if not the theology of each inevitably has been shaped by the other.

Three purposes, perhaps better termed as perspectives, are brought to this discussion:

- Explicit consideration of **linkages between Christianity & Islam** – dating back to the earliest years of both religions
- **Chronology of Islam** – starting with Muhammad and extending to the near-modern era
- Identification of **differences & changes within Islam** – as well as commonalities extending down over the last 1-1/2 millenia.

This is a survey of Islam from a distinctive vantage point – that of Christianity. For the reader, we suggest that the important thing is neither one of agreement or disagreement with this methodological approach. If there is value, it is in the opportunity for fresh insight. A theme running through this discussion is that, ultimately, a new perspective is paramount – yielding creative solutions to an ages-long conundrum that now threatens the very foundations of our post-modern world.

Caveats

This exploration is not without its limitations. It is brief, thereby often not doing full justice to potentially important nuances within each faith, each tradition.

Viewing Islam through the prism of Christianity can be validated from an historical perspective, much as Christianity can be better understood in the context of an even older Jewish heritage. For those who believe Islam to be a fresh break from past traditions, new thinking devoid of historic context, the approach suggested by this review may seem unduly constraining, even biased.

In response, we contend that the practice of assessing Islam as a religion and theology independent of historical context has not and will not work. By emphasizing differences rather than commonality, we risk continued misunderstanding, terrorism and global instability. So we offer, instead, a fresh perspective – with breakthrough possibility.

I. Christianity Before Islam – Setting the Stage

Consistent with the stated objective of exploring Islam from the distinctive perspective of Christianity, this story starts with the apostolic church of the early Christian era – in the generation immediately following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Pre 70 AD Dispersion

The Acts of the Apostles records that, just before his ascension, Jesus instructed his apostles, saying that “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”¹ This has generally been interpreted by Christians as a mission program of continued expansion from a central core – to eventually envelope the entire earth. Often missed is that Samaria (a land even then of intermarried Jews and Arabs), is immediately placed on a par by the departing Jesus with Jewish Judea.

The early leader of the church is the apostle Peter – as highlighted by his role from the Pentecost forward to about the time of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, the conversion of the Roman Cornelius and then Peter’s eventual imprisonment. Upon his miraculous release from prison, Peter specifically requests that word of his release be relayed to Jesus’ brother James – a clear signal that church leadership has now changed.

Saul (renamed Paul) emerges to dominate the last half of the book of Acts. This last half is punctuated by the infamous Council of Jerusalem. This meeting of the early apostolic leaders is conducted to address the conflict between James and Paul over requirements for admission of non-Jews to the Christian assembly.

James would die of stoning at the hands of the Sanhedrin and Jewish Christianity would fade with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in 70 AD. Based on New Testament accounts, Paul emerges as the apparent winner from this encounter – seemingly assuming the mantle of undisputed Christian leadership.

But the story is not quite this simple. After the death of James in 62 AD, Jesus’ cousin Symeon (son of Clopas) assumed leadership of the Jerusalem church. Much of the Jewish church emigrated pre-70 to the Greek city Pella in Transjordan. Eventually taking the name of Ebionites (or “the poor”), the remnants of the original Jerusalem church also took a neutral stance in the Jewish war with Rome.

By the last decade of the first century, this position of neutrality had served to sever any remaining affiliation between Christianity and Judaism. A special benediction to the Jewish Shema (from Deuteronomy) proclaiming “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God...” now

¹ Acts 1: 8.

ended by anathematizing the Christian heretic or “Nazarene”, excluding him everlastingly from Jewish fellowship.

These Ebionites would eventually also be disenfranchised by their orthodox Christian counterparts. Ebionites become known for denying the full deity of Christ and rejecting the virgin birth (but believing that the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism).

The story does not end here. The Ebionites appear to have flourished in the second and third centuries, then faded in the fourth and fifth centuries in the wake of criticism from orthodox church fathers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius and Jerome.

There are indications that branches of this sect termed Nazarites or “Nozrim” in Hebrew or “Nasrani” in Arabic ended up in what is today Northern Syria, Iraq and Iran with connections to later Shii Islam. Islamic concepts such as the hidden Imam offer connections back to bedrock Jewish Christian concepts of the Primal or Secret Adam. When translated to Greek, these concepts also mirror New Testament terms such as the *logos* or Word or the “Christ”.²

Constantine & Imperial Christianity

We now turn our attention back to the center of the civilized world, more specifically to the period when Roman Imperialism accepted and absorbed Christianity – beginning with the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312. The following dates highlight a series of events – indicative of trends having the cumulative effect of marginalizing Christians who hailed from the eastern Mediterranean and northern Africa. These events also served to set the stage for eventual Muslim conquest of the cradle of Christianity just 3-4 centuries later:

- *313 Donatist schism* – this simmering feud within Christendom came to a head with newly converted Constantine convening a tribunal at home of his wife Fausta (daughter of former emperor Maximian) on the Italian coast. The Donatists of North Africa favored a rigorous approach to Christians who had lapsed (or apostized) during the Diocletian persecution of Christians a decade earlier in 303. These Donatists included rural Berbers and Phoenicians who also tended to be hostile to Roman presence in Africa.

A century later, Augustine would develop a theory of “just war” based on Luke 14:23 (“Compel people to come in”) to lead a renewed drive against the ever recalcitrant Donatists. By 405, the Roman Church had convinced the emperor of the west, Honorius, to outlaw the Donatists, also depriving the Donatists of bishops and funds. Meeting together for religious purposes was

² For a more detailed discussion, see Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus* (Penguin Books: New York), 1996, pp. 250, 377,

declared punishable by death. Donatists could not hold public office, protect their property in the courts, nor pass their property to their heirs.”³ Donatism as a distinct sect within Christianity would finally disappear three centuries later only with Islamic conquest of Roman provinces of North Africa

- *325 Council of Nicaea* – condemns Arius (a presbyter from Alexandria, Egypt) for saying that Jesus is of “similar” rather than the “same” substance as God. Athanasius (also of Alexandria) would become chief defender of the resulting Nicene Creed and first formulator of the books of the New Testament. Later in the 4th century, the Cappadocians (led by Basil of Caesarea) would develop a Nicene compromise predicated on three divine entities sharing a common nature – a belief that would be adopted by the Eastern (Orthodox) church.
- *400 Council at Alexandria* – condemned ideas of Origen (185-254 from Alexandria and Caesarea) on the Trinity (over the issue of subordinationism). Because the great theologian did not support a full triune godhead, Origen was condemned again at the Council of Constantinople in the 6th century.
- *431 Council of Ephesus* – condemned the Nestorian view of the Antioch school that postulated the existence of two separate natures, human and divine, residing *side by side* in the person of Christ. Nestorius was unhappy with titling the Virgin Mary as ‘Theotokos’ (bearer of God) but believed Jesus had two distinct persons – one human and born of Mary, the other divine.
- *451 Council of Chalcedon* – condemned a belief known as the Monophysite heresy which had developed in opposition to Nestorianism. Chalcedon reaffirmed Nicaea with Christ as one hypostasis (or union) but with two undivided natures. Chalcedon also gave Constantinople equal privileges with Rome at the expense of the see of Alexandria. In contrast to Antioch, the theologians of Alexandria (as the other centre of Christianity in the east) believed in the union of the two natures to form the God-man who had divine humanity. An extreme Alexandrian view, known as Monophysitism and held by Eutyches was that the two natures of Christ became “blended and confused” in Christ with the result that he had only one nature, the divine.

Both Palestine and Egypt (Monophysites) subsequently rejected the results of Chalcedon – with mob violence. This rejection eventually led to creation of Armenian church. In opposition was creation of a separate Nestorian church within the Persian empire (with missions to Arabia, India, Turkestan), initially flourishing under Islamic rule but destroyed by later Mongol invasions. In contrast, the Monophysite tradition survives in Armenian, Syrian and Egyptian (Coptic) churches.

The result? In spite of official condemnation by the western orthodox Church centered at Rome, the Nestorian and Monophysite views continued to have a great impact in the east,

³ See web site <http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch25.htm>, as of July 2004.

rendering both regions more welcoming to subsequent Islamic Arab conquest. As one author *A History of the Christian Church* has observed: “Since Syria was already lost to the empire, the only effect which this decree (Monothelitism) had was to inflame the opposition between Chalcedonians and Monophysites in Egypt and thus render that province the more ready for Arab conquest of it in 641.”⁴

Overall the pattern is clear. Suppression of Christian schismatics of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean by the orthodox church of the west would pave the way for the quick and widespread acceptance of Islam in the 7th century. In the process, Christianity would lose its intellectual energy and fervor. The homeland of Jesus, the scenes of the Pauline missions, literary base of Origen and Eusebius, the home of the great defender of the Nicene Creed, the birthplace of Augustine – all would abandon their Christian heritage for the more accommodating world of Islam.

⁴ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*.

II. Muhammad & Islam

We have briefly surveyed nearly six centuries of early Christianity, highlighting conditions and event that would prove to the undoing of the Christian homeland. We now turn to the life of Muhammad and resulting formation of Islam.

The prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in AD 570; he died at age 62 years of age in 632. Muhammad's father was a member of the Hasidim (or Hashim) clan of powerful *Quraysh* tribe, but died before Muhammad was born. Muhammad lived with the family of his Bedouin wet nurse until he was 6, came back to Mecca only to experience the death of his mother. He then lived briefly with his grandfather until he, too, passed away – with no inheritance to Muhammad. From age 8, he was brought up by his uncle Abu Talib, the *sayyid* (chief) of the clan.

At age 25, Muhammad married a distant relative, the widow Khadijah after managing her caravan trade. They were married for 25 years and had 6 children. Later, Muhammad would endorse polygamy and took several wives – with an estimated 12 added wives and concubines and one resulting son. His surviving daughter, Fatimah (by Khadijah) had descendents known as sharifs or sayyids.

Formative Years of Islam

Much as in Judea at the time of Jesus, Arabia at the turn of the 7th century was in the throes of great economic unrest. Wide gaps between rich and poor were a growing source of concern for Muhammad who advocated sharing wealth and a society where the weak and vulnerable could be treated with respect.

While pagan polytheistic worship prevailed in Arabia, Muhammad had many contacts with Christians and Jews – in large part due to his involvement with the caravan trade. He came to desire the application of a more modern concept of a single deity for Arabs as well. This was born from great initial respect for the Jewish and Christian traditions. Despite later contempt for what he concluded were weaker forms of monotheism, his continued dependence on these earlier traditions shows through the Qur'an.

At age 40, Muhammad would spend much time in meditation. He retreated to a cave and began to receive instruction from the archangel Gabriel. This instruction served as the basis for writings that would form the Qur'an (610 AD).

Initially, he confided only in his wife Khadijah and her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian (who compared Muhammad's experience with that of Moses). The cousin was a Nassara, essentially an off-shoot of the earlier "Ebionites" or Judeo-Christians who did not accept the full divinity of Christ. Waraka bin Nawfal reportedly was the Ebionite Christian bishop of Mecca and performed the marriage between Muhammad and

Khadijah. His influence on Muhammad was instrumental in helping to generate the Qur'an.

Muhammad also sought counsel from a "Jacobite" monk called Bohera – who taught aspects of Jewish religious customs. The Jacobite church used Syriac as its liturgical and theological tongue and had a separate Monophysite hierarchy – rejecting the Trinitarian formulation of Christian orthodoxy.

After he professed to be a prophet, his favourite concubine would be Miriam, a Coptic Christian. Miriam was also the mother of Muhammad's favored son Ibrahim.

A New Religion & A Political Response

Early on it would seem that the prophet did not plan to develop a new religion, but rather was more intent on bringing and adapting the old faith of One God to the Arabs. During this early period, Muslims would perform the *salat* ritual prayer facing Jerusalem.

Muslims were not particularly well accepted by the Arabian power elite. By 616, relations between the Meccan establishment and Muhammad's converts had deteriorated due to opposition to Islamic theological concepts such as the afterlife and redistributionist economics. A boycott was imposed on marriage and trade with Muslims.

As relations deteriorated in Mecca, opportunities elsewhere began to appear more favorable. In response to invitation, Muhammad and his followers conducted a migration or *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina in 622. The Meccan establishment (together with their Jewish allies) vowed revenge for this abandonment but were defeated in the Battle of Badr (624).

In response to Jewish assistance in the Meccan attack, Muhammad changed the orientation of the *salat* in January 624. The Prophet told his congregants to turn away from Jerusalem and face Mecca – a sign of independence from the other monotheistic religions of the middle east.

Nonetheless, Jerusalem would figure as an important place for Islam. Jerusalem is the present location of the Dome of the Rock, where Muslims believe that Muhammad visited heaven during his lifetime and returned to describe its environs. Tradition also associates the Rock with Abraham and his son Ishmael – venerated father of the Arab nation through Abraham's concubine Hagar.

In 625, Muslims were defeated at Battle of Uhud. In retaliation, a Jewish tribe was expelled from Medina for collaborating with Mecca. When the Jewish tribe of Qurayzah sided with Mecca at the Battle of the Trench, Muhammad had seven hundred Jewish men killed, with women and children sold as slaves.

In 628, Muhammad struck for peace with the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah reached between Mecca and Medina. With this accommodation, Muhammad became the most powerful man in Arabia.

The accommodation would not last for long. In 630, Mecca violated its treaty but then *surrendered*, opening the gate to the city to the conquerors. Muhammad was able to take the city without bloodshed or forced conversions. This act of Meccan surrender would serve as a metaphor for the religion that became known as Islam, which translated means “surrender” or “submission” to Allah.

The prophet and his new found power were soon parted. In 632, Muhammad died. He was succeeded by Abu Bakr who was elected as *khalifah* (or representative).

Supplement - Karen Armstrong and Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time

Chapter 1 – Mecca. Karen Armstrong’s outstanding survey begins with Muhammad, at age 40 being attacked by a *jinni* – a fiery spirit inhabitant of the Arabian steppe, uttering the command “Recite.”

Mecca was up from poverty, thriving as an international caravan trade center – linking east Africa to India and north to Syria and Byzantium. This was in contrast to a past and a rural present of the *ghazu* (acquisition raid) as essential to the nomadic economy. In the new economy Bedouin agreed not to attack caravans in exchange for rights as merchant guides and protectors.

Persia and Byzantium were at war by the time of Muhammad’s birth in 570, weakening both empires. Muhammad was born to the distinguished clan of Hashim; his great-grandfather was first to engage in independent trade with Syria and Yemen. While benefiting from this “aggressive market economy,” Muhammad felt the need for social reform based on a “new spiritual solution.”

Allah was distant and believed by many to be identical with the God worshipped by Christians and Jews. The *Quraysh* Arabs also worshipped other gods of “lesser rank.” Judaism and Christianity were viewed more as tribal affiliations, with traditions not much different than their own. A cousin of Muhammad and a cousin of his wife (Waraqah) both became Christians. Waraqah warned Muhammad that the path would not be easy.

Muhammad was assured: “By the morning hours ... By the night when it is still ... Your Lord has not abandoned you and does not hate you ...” Allah offers assurance, reminding of the need to be kind, care for the orphaned and deprived, and ending by asking Muhammad to “proclaim” the grace of your Lord.

Chapter 2 – Jahiliyyah (Time of Ignorance – or Irascibility). Muhammad draws supporters but also early opposition. Uncle Abu Talib would continue to support Muhammad, but was deeply pained by departure from the absolute authority of ancestors. When Muslims gathered to pray, he found himself surrounded by “the young men and weak people of the city.” The social splits in Mecca were familiar: young vs. old, rich vs. poor, men vs. women.

The Qur’an, as revealed, condemned this inequality. A Muslim submitted and “was proud to be God’s slave.”

After three years (in 615), Allah instructed Muhammad to deliver his message to the whole clan of Hashim – but was rejected. He then preaches throughout the city, but not successfully. Businessmen “had little taste for ideological debate.” Armstrong maintains that, at this time, he had “no political ambitions.”

Muhammad chants verses about three “daughters of God.” Again, according to Armstrong, “the beauty of the Qur’an had made Allah a vibrant, indeed overwhelming reality.” Other deities were helpless and ineffectual.

The Quraysh (Muhammad’s tribe, rulers of Mecca) revolted, unhappy that “our fathers should be reviled, our customs mocked, and our gods insulted.” His uncle, Abu Talib, protected Muhammad. But Abu Talib’s half brother had opposed Muhammad – forcing his sons to repudiate betrothals to two of the prophet’s daughters. As an ordinary mortal, he was unable to perform a miracle, as Moses or Jesus had done.

Muhammad gave up on converting the establishment and went after the disaffected poor. Some were sent to Abyssinia (Ethiopia), as the Christian governor gave asylum. The clans of Hashim and al-Muttalib were now boycotted – prevented even from buying food, as punishment for removing themselves from the tribe. The Qur’an urged patience – and looked to the examples of Joseph, Noah, Jonah, Moses, Jesus – who had preached reformation.

The boycott ended. But early in 619, Muhammad’s wife Khadijah died (with health perhaps ruined by food shortages). Muhammad endures a “year of sadness.” Then Abu Talib was ruined financially, fell ill and died. And the new chief of Hashim was Abu Lahab, Muhammad’s opponent.

Chapter 3 – Hijrah (Migration). Muhammad’s position in Mecca deteriorates. He took refuge in Allah: “Oh God, to Thee I complain of my weakness, my little resource and lowliness before me. ... There is no power and no might save in Thee” A Christian slave boy (from Nineveh, land of Jonah) brings grapes to revive the prophet.

At this low point, Muhammad has the greatest mystical experience of his life. While sleeping at or near the tombs of Ishmael and Hagar, he is awakened by Gabriel and transported to Jerusalem – the “Remote House” of the People of the Book. He sees Adam, Abraham and “brothers” Jesus, Enoch, Aaron, Moses and Joseph. After praying together, Muhammad and Gabriel begin an ascent to the divined throne – through 7 heavens:

- The 1st – presided over by Adam (where Muhammad sees a vision of Hell)
- 2nd – Jesus and John the Baptist
- 3rd – Joseph
- 4th – Enoch
- 5th & 6th – Moses & Aaron
- 7th – Abraham

Armstrong suggests that in this vision Muhammad trades the pagan pluralism but arrogance of Mecca for monotheistic pluralism – with all prophets as “brothers.” Back in Mecca, during the hajj of 620, he meets with pilgrims. Six in particular are interested –

from Yathrib, a city wracked by two Arab clans of Aws and Khazraj with Jewish settlement tribes also increasingly ensnared. Muhammad was cultivated as an arbitrator of disputes. They agree to report back in a year.

Muhammad now remarries – one wife, then another. In 621, 6 converts from Yathrib return, bringing 7 others. Muslims would now pray facing Jerusalem; he adopted a version of Jewish dietary laws similar to those of early Christians. Ansar returned to Yathrib; the city is about to be given the Aramaic (Jewish) name Medina (the City of the Prophet). In August about 70 Muslims head out.

Muhammad stays behind; he avoids a morning assassination attempt, then hides in a mountain cave just outside Mecca. Some but not all Arabs accept him. The same was true for Jews – including three Jewish tribes who joined pagan Arabs.

Muhammad also learned that some Christians believe in a trinity and that Jesus is the son of Allah. He regarded these people as heretic impulses of a deluded minority. Muhammad returns to the “religion of Abraham,” who was neither Jew nor Christian. Abraham was viewed as a man of faith “who surrendered himself.” In January 624, Muhammad has the congregation turn again in the direction of Mecca instead of Jerusalem – a declaration of independence from the older faiths.

Chapter 4 – Jihad (Struggle). According to Armstrong, Muhammad had to secure his position in Medina (and his followers earn a living) and get noticed back in the center of Mecca. So, he started to raid Meccan caravans on their way to Syria. “Their aim was not to shed blood, but to secure an income by capturing camels, merchandise, and prisoners, who could be held for ransom” – with the ghazu a normal expedient in times of hardship. Eight raids were dispatched. He has a vision that provides the Islamic version of a “just war” theory. His raiders then even violate the sacred month.

During Ramadan (March 624), 314 Muslims from Medina become outnumbered by 2,000 men from Mecca – including relatives of Muhammad. The Muslims were disciplined, bombarding the enemy with arrows, drawing swords for hand-to-hand combat at the last minute. By noon, the Quraysh had fled in disarray. Muslims gathered and mutilated captives; Muhammad ordered his soldiers to desist. Back in Medina, he took another wife and, according to Armstrong, treated them more gently than women in Mecca.

Three Jewish tribes begin to align with Mecca. Muhammad expels one, the Qaynuqa. Meccans again attack with 3,000 men and a similar number of camels in March 625. The main Jewish tribes refuse to fight, so Muhammad is outnumbered 3:1 and is defeated. With the death of 65 Muslims, there are many widows. A revelation allows Muhammad to give Muslims permission to take four wives – the most explicit authorization of polygamy to date. Armstrong argues this was better than the traditional alternative, when a woman could be visited by all her “husbands.”

In effect, the Qur'an encouraged a more patriarchal society: "Marry the spouseless among you, and your slaves and handmaidens that are righteous; if they are poor, God will enrich them of his bounty, God is all-embracing, all knowing."

Muhammad expels a second Jewish tribe, the Nadiris. He raided Bedouins who were siding with Mecca. He marries the widow of his Meccan cousin Abu Salamah, Hind who was 29, beautiful, and upper class. She had also previously cut off the nose, ears and genitals of one of Muhammad's warriors and eaten a portion of his liver. Her arrival was resented by 'A'isha. Muhammad turns more toward sexual equality, no longer to be bequeathed to male heirs like camels or date palms. They could inherit and compete with men for a share of the estate. An orphan was not to be married to her guardian against her will. The dowry was now given to the bride (and not to the family).

But Muhammad relented with pressure from his men and the continued exigencies of war. "Very well, beat them, but only the worst of you will have recourse to such methods."

In March 627, 10,000 Quraysh and confederates marched against the 3,000 Muslims/Bedouins in Medina. Muhammad protected the city with a trench. The siege lasted only a month. The Jewish tribe of Qurayzah supported the Meccans. The day after the retreat, the Qurayzah asked for terms to leave as their other Jewish tribal counterparts. Muhammad refused, ordering all 700 men executed (for treason), wives sold into slavery, and property divided among the Muslims. Although the low point of Muhammad's career, Armstrong notes that "violence and killing on this scale were the norm."

Chapter 5 – Salam (Peace). Muhammad's victory over the Quraysh of Mecca enhanced his prestige and led Arabs to question the validity of their traditional polytheistic practices. He continued the raids and economic blockage. As Armstrong says, the Arabs "were pragmatic people, less interested in abstract speculation than in the effectiveness of a religious system."

In Medina there is conflict; Ibn Ubayy insinuated he retained leadership. Some had designs on his wives – after his death. The Hypocrites followed them, yelling obscenities and making lewd gestures. Muhammad marries a cousin, Zaynab, after she is divorced from her husband. His early wife A'isha, was with Muhammad when he received a divine message that Allah wanted the match. She remarks, "Truly the Lord makes haste to do thy bidding." The verses of the *hijab* (or curtain to ask for the Prophet's wives "from behind a screen") would be used 3 generations after his death to justify the veiling of women and segregation in separate parts of the house.

A rumor arises from a mishap after a battle that A'isha has fallen for an old male friend; even Muhammad doubts her innocence. He receives no messages from God, the first time that the divine voice is silent. Muhammad is forced to call a meeting of the Medinan chiefs to take action against Ibn Ubayy, who was threatening his family. A'isha (14 years

old) refuses to acknowledge any wrong, Muhammad is convinced via a trance, but A'isha offered no thanks to her spouse: "I shall rise and give thanks to Allah alone."

Muhammad and his entourage takes the *hajj* to Mecca, unarmed. The Quraysh are bent on revenge. In a sign of extraordinary conciliation, Muhammad agrees to return to Medina and complete the *hajj* next year. There would be a truce between the two cities for 10 years. Quraysh who had converted to Islam could return to Mecca; the Bedouin were released and could choose to ally with either Medina or Mecca. Hudaibiyyah improved the standing of Islam on the peninsular, but did not help Muhammad back in Medina.

So Muhammad goes for a diversion, besieging and obtaining surrender from the Jewish tribe of Nadir. He marries the daughter of the chief, Saffiyyah, who enters Islam. Muhammad tells Saffiyyah that if any wives taunt her over being Jewish, she is to reply: "My father is Aaron and my uncle is Moses."

None of the women married in Medina had borne him children, so Muhammad takes Maryam, daughter of the governor in Alexander, to wife as a Christian who did not choose to convert to Islam. She gives birth to Ibrahim.

After a successful *hajj* to Mecca, the Quraysh reneged on the treaty of Hudaibiyyah. Muhammad marches with an army of 10,000. The Meccans finally surrender. Muhammad enters the city, smashes the stone effigies and pictures of pagan deities except, reportedly, frescoes of Jesus and Mary. He also issued a general amnesty for all but about 10 on the Black List. He then defeats the tribes of Hawazin and Tha'qif, who join his confederacy.

He returns to Medina, leaving Mecca to retain self-governance. Enemies were reinstated, promoted and showered with gifts.

In 632, Muhammad was ailing and his baby son Ibrahim died. At Namira near Mount 'Arafat, Muhammad preaches his farewell sermon. He returns to Medina, experiencing incapacitating headaches and fainting attacks. He wanted A'isha. He goes to the mosque, returns to A'isha's hut and lays peacefully in her lap. She would later say: "It was due to my ignorance and extreme youth that the Prophet died in my arms." She heard him murmur: "Nay the most Exalted Companion in Paradise" – Gabriel had come to fetch him.

Epilogue (Karen Armstrong's Closing Note). Upon hearing of the death of Muhammad, women traveled to the mosque. Umar refused to believe his death, saying the soul had left his body temporarily. Abu Bakr (one of the first converts and father of A'isha) quiets the crowd and Umar, saying that since Muhammad taught the unity of God, how could he imagine he was immortal?

Muhammad proved as controversial in death as life. People had come to Islam for different reasons: social justice (but not necessarily the ideal of non-violence), raids on caravans, politics (as with the Bedouin) who believed that Islam died with the prophet.

Four caliphs were elected by the people: Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Ali (as the rightly guided). They led wars of conquest, aided by the weakness of the Persian and Byzantine empires. Civil wars led to the assassinations of ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, ‘Ali (and Husayn, the Prophet’s grandson).

Intense debates about political leadership of the ummah (or community) “played a role in Islam that was similar to the great Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries in Christianity.”

- Sufism – turning backs on court luxury to live as austere as the Prophet.
- Shi‘ah – a self-styled party of ‘Ali (Muhammad’s closest male relative) on the belief that ummah must be led by a direct descendent and who came to protest mainstream Islam to return to the egalitarian spirit of the Qur’an.
- Sunnis – not mentioned by Armstrong (in this book) but representing the Muslim majority, revering the four rashidun (rightly guided caliphs) and generally validating the existing Islamic order.

Armstrong concludes with a note about the 21st century: “If we are to avoid catastrophe, the Muslim and Western worlds must learn not merely to tolerate but to appreciate one another.”

III. The Qur'an & Christianity

Since the prophet Muhammad formed his monotheistic beliefs as a result of interaction with Jews and Christians, it is not surprising that both would figure prominently in the Qur'an (or Koran). The entire Qur'an is riddled with references to the Old Testament patriarchs as well as to the life and ministry of Jesus.

Qur'an means "recitation," meant to be read aloud. The text of the Qur'an is not meant to be read sequentially. It is intentionally repetitive. In its current form, chapters or surahs appear to be ranged arbitrarily, albeit from longest to shortest.

Islam and Christianity (as well as Judaism) share many beliefs in common. Among these are:

- A common ancestral lineage through Abraham.
- Belief in a monotheistic God (albeit interpreted differently).
- A Christian notion of the Last Judgment, also central to the early message of the Qur'an.⁵

The Qur'an & The Patriarchs

Throughout the Qur'an, Mohammed repeatedly traces his ancestral and spiritual roots back to Abraham (or Ibrahim). Ibrahim is mentioned 70 times in the Qur'an, often in the company of other patriarchs including Noah (Nuh), Ishmael (Isamil), Isaac (Ishaq), and Jacob (Yaqoub):

- [2.133] Nay! were you witnesses when death visited Yaqoub, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We will serve your God and the God of your fathers, **Ibrahim** and Ismail and Ishaq (or Isaac), one God only, and to Him do we submit.
- [3.67] **Ibrahim** was not a Jew nor a Christian but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists.
- [3.68] Most surely the nearest of people to **Ibrahim** are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe and Allah is the guardian of the believers.
- [3.84] Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to **Ibrahim** and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqoub (Jacob) and the tribes, and what was given to Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.

⁵ Per Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*, 2007.

- [11.75] Most surely **Ibrahim** was forbearing, tender-hearted, oft-returning (to Allah):
- [16.120] Surely **Ibrahim** was an exemplar, obedient to Allah, upright, and he was not of the polytheists.
- [26.69] And recite to them the story of **Ibrahim**.
- [87.19] The scriptures of **Ibrahim** and Musa.

To Muhammad, Abraham is both spiritual and genealogical ancestor to Arab Muslims. Along with other patriarchs of the Old Testament, he was also neither Jew nor Christian.

Christians & Jews

There are 15 references to Christians in the Qur'an, 23 to Jews. Most often passages that mention Christians also include reference to their Jewish counterparts. The messages given by the Qur'an are mixed – sometimes complimentary, more often critical. The most favorable passages tend to occur early on in the writings of the Prophet:

- [2.62] Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the **Christians**, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.
- [2.113] And the Jews say: The **Christians** do not follow anything (good) and the **Christians** say: The Jews do not follow anything (good) while they recite the (same) Book. Even thus say those who have no knowledge, like to what they say; so Allah shall judge between them on the day of resurrection in what they differ.
- [2.135] And they say: Be Jews or **Christians**, you will be on the right course. Say: Nay! (we follow) the religion of Ibrahim, the Hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists.
- [3.67] Ibrahim was not a Jew nor a **Christian** but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists.
- [5.69] Surely those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the **Christians** whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does good – they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.
- [9.30] And the Jews say: Uzair is the son of Allah; and the **Christians** say: The Messiah is the son of Allah; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; may Allah destroy them; how they are turned away! *Note:* Uzair is the Ezra of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Muhammad was clearly aware of the conflict between Christian and Jew. To his mind, this conflict did not reflect well on either religion. And orthodox Christians received

added approbation because of their adherence to a triune Godhead, a belief that Muhammad believed was equivalent to polytheism.

The Qur'an & Jesus

Jesus (or Isa) is identified 27 times in the Qur'an. A few examples:

- [2.87 - part] And most certainly We gave Musa (Moses) the Book and We sent apostles after him one after another; and We gave **Isa**, the son of Marium, clear arguments and strengthened him with the holy spirit,
- [2.253] We have made some of these apostles to excel the others among them are they to whom Allah spoke, and some of them He exalted by (many degrees of) rank; and We gave clear miracles to **Isa** son of Marium, and strengthened him with the holy spirit. And if Allah had pleased, those after them would not have fought one with another after clear arguments had come to them, but they disagreed; so there were some of them who believed and others who denied; and if Allah had pleased they would not have fought one with another, but Allah brings about what He intends.
- [3.55] And when Allah said: O **Isa**, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed.
- [3.59] Surely the likeness of **Isa** is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was.
- [3.84] Say: We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqoub and the tribes, and what was given to Musa and **Isa** and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.
- [4.171] O followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, **Isa** son of Marium is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which He communicated to Marium and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.
- [5.110] When Allah will say: O **Isa** son of Marium! Remember My favor on you and on your mother, when I strengthened you I with the holy Spirit, you spoke to the people in the cradle and I when of old age, and when I taught you the Book and the wisdom and the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Christian New Testament); and when you determined out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leprous by My permission; and

when you brought forth the dead by My permission; and when I withheld the children of Israel from you when you came to them with clear arguments, but those who disbelieved among them said: This is nothing but clear enchantment. (*Note: This excerpt from the *Koran* corresponds with an account from the non-canonical *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, discovered with the Nag Hammadi library in 1945, chapter 2).*

- [61.6] And when **Isa** son of Marium said: O children of Israel! surely I am the apostle of Allah to you, verifying that which is before me of the Taurat and giving the good news of an Apostle who will come after me, his name being Ahmad, but when he came to them with clear arguments they said: This is clear magic.

Perhaps the clearest explication of Muhammad's view of Jesus' role in the godhead is given in a text not even mentioning Jesus by name. At [17:111], Muhammad writes: "Praise be to Allah, Who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion; nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation: yes, magnify him for His greatness and glory."

The prophet Muhammad clearly has great respect for Jesus and for the Christian New Testament. He describes Jesus as a miracle worker and as strengthened by the holy spirit. Yet for Muhammad, Jesus is also clearly not a part of the Godhead; rather, he is "only an apostle."

The Qur'an and Mary (the Mother of Jesus)

If Jesus is oft-mentioned, his mother Mary (or Mirium) is even more popular – mentioned 35 times in the Qur'an. Again, some examples:

- [3.42] And when the angels said: O **Marium**! surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the world.
- [3.43] O **Marium**! keep to obedience to your Lord and humble yourself, and bow down with those who bow.
- [4.171] O followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of **Marium** is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which He communicated to **Marium** and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.
- [5.75 - part] The Messiah, son of **Marium** is but an apostle.
- [66.12] And **Marium**, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His books, and she was of, the obedient ones.

For Muhammad, the mother of Jesus clearly has an elevated position. She is “chosen” and “above the women of the world.” While not directly claiming her virginity, Muhammad comes close, saying that she “guarded her chastity.”

Qur'an Summarized

In summary, Muhammad readily traces his ancestral and religious roots to the patriarchs of the Hebrew Old Testament, particularly to Abraham (as a true Muslim, or one who submits). Patriarchs extending from the descendents of Abraham to Moses (of the Book) are also revered.

As evidenced not only by his writings but also actions, Muhammad had a love/hate relationship with Judaism and Christianity. These non-Muslims may be eligible for a divine reward but the Prophet is skeptical. After all, he points out it is widespread knowledge that Jews and Christians are disdainful of each other, hardly an example worth emulating.

To Muhammad, Jesus is not divine, not part of a holy trinity, but “only an apostle.” Yet Muhammad attests to Jesus’ ability to perform miracles, including raising others from the dead. Jesus’ mother has a special place in the Qur’an – for her chastity, as one chosen of God, as the mother of the Messiah.

Note: Quotations from The Holy Qur'an are from a translation by M.H. Shakir and published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., in 1983. Information is from the web site as of June 7, 2005 is <http://www.hti.umich.edu/k/koran/>

IV. Islam In the Century After Muhammad

The century after Muhammad's death would prove instrumental in the shaping of Islam – even as we know it today. Two forces were of particular significance – the rapid Muslim conquest of previously Christian cultures in the near east and north Africa coupled with emergent disagreement over the rightful leadership to Islam:

- From 632-34, Abu Bakr served as the elected caliphate (and direct successor to the prophet Muhammad). Despite a relatively brief two year rule, Abu Bakr was able to conduct successful wars of *riddah* against secessionist tribes.
- From 634-44, the Caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab moved quickly to conquer Iraq, Syria and Egypt in the name of Islam. Jerusalem was captured in 638 (as the 3rd holiest city of Islam). *Ghazu* raids were extended against non-Muslim communities in neighboring countries as a means to develop new economic resources for the Arab Muslims and quell internal Arab feuding.
- Muslim invaders were often welcomed with open arms – particularly by Christians. As one recent writer observes: “In the Syrian and North African provinces of Byzantium, the local population had been alienated by the religious intolerance of the Greek Orthodox establishment, and were not disposed to come to their aid when the Arabs attacked ... Indeed, some of the Roman Christians, who had been persecuted by the Greek (or orthodox) Christians for their heretical opinion, greatly preferred Muslim to Byzantine rule.”⁶
- During this period, Arabs proved to be relatively tolerant of other religions (including Jews and Christians), once conquered. Protected subjects (known as *dhimmis*) paid a poll tax in return for military protection and were allowed to practice their own faith – consistent with the Qur'an.
- From 644-650, Muslim rule was extended to Cyprus, Tripoli, Iran, Afghanistan, and Sind (southern Pakistan).
- In 656, Caliph Uthman was assassinated by malcontent Muslim soldiers. Ali ibn Abi Talib (Muhammad's cousin who opposed the central authority of Umar and Uthman) was acclaimed as new caliph. However, this acclamation was not accepted by all Muslims.
- Over the next four years from 656-60, the first period of *fitnah* (or trial) occurred with an ensuing civil war. Ali would be murdered in 661 on the plain of Kerbala. As a result, Ali became “a symbol for Shii Muslims of the chronic injustice that seems to pervade human life; it also seemed to show the impossibility of integrating the religious imperative in the harsh world of

⁶ Karen Armstrong, *Islam*, p. 30.

politics ...”⁷ Ali’s shrine is in present day Najaf, Iraq. His son Hasan ibn Ali (the second Shii Imam) agreed to retire in Medina.

- Over the period of 661-80, Caliph Muawiyah restored the unity of the empire, revived Umar’s system of segregating Muslims from the subject population and *discouraged* conversion of subjected populations to Islam.
- From 685-705, Abd al-Malik restored Umayyad rule. The Dome of the Rock was completed at the Jerusalem Temple mount in 691. This was the first major Islamic monument asserting supremacy of Islam in a city with a large Christian majority. This massive project also had the effect of setting in place an architectural and artistic style for Islam as a cultural as well as religious force.
- Uman II (717-20) became the first Caliph to actively encourage conversion to Islam by *dhimmis*. When converted, the dhimmi no longer had to pay the otherwise obligatory poll tax.
- Hasan al-Basri (d. 728) exemplified a renewed Muslim piety. Moving from Medina to Basrah, he developed a spirituality of contempt for worldly goods – beginning the Muslim tradition of combining a disciplined interior and spiritual life with political opposition to the government at hand.
- In 749, Mansur II served as the last Umayyad caliph and was defeated in Iraq by the Abbasid faction from Iran. This defeat reflected both the desire to see a member of Muhammad’s family on the throne and converts’ unhappiness with what amounted to being second-class citizens within Arabian culture.

With the death of Hasan al-Basri and then Mansur, the era of the caliphate would come to an end. This also marks a major turning point for Islam. The inward oriented spiritual side of Muhammad’s teachings increasingly would give way to the more secular inclinations of what would become known as Sunni Islam.

Much as the first century after Christ shaped most of the theological issues present even today, so the first century after Muhammad would prove to unleash the schisms within Islam that shape Middle Eastern and global politics even into the 21st century. Here we see the emergent clash between Shii and Sunni, between introspective and militant Islam. The next several centuries would serve to deepen these philosophical and cultural divisions – even as Islam emerged increasingly triumphant on a more global stage.

⁷ Karen Armstrong, *op. cit.*

V. Variations of Islam

At this point it is useful to turn for a moment to the major strands of Islam belief and practice – distinguished between Shii and Sunni Islam. Sufism is also included as a more mystical off-shoot of the Sunni.

Shii Islam

Shii belong to the Shiah i-Ali (partisans of Ali), believing that the Prophet's closest male relative Ali ibn Abi Talib should have ruled in place of the rashidun. Shii revere the imams who are the direct descendents of Ali and wife Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter).

The rashidun themselves had been the four “rightly guided” caliphs who were companions and immediate successors of Muhammad: Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib. The source of doctrinal authority in Irânian Shi'ism would become the *Ayatollâhs*, who were not individually believed to be the Hidden Imâm but were thought to communicate with him.

Sunni Islam

Across the overall expanse of the middle east and far eastern countries dominated by Islam, *Sunnis* represent the Muslim majority. Sunnis revere the four rashidun (rightly guided caliphs) and validate the existing Islamic order.

Sunni Islam is often pursued not a rationalist but more of a mystical and contemplative discipline, encouraging Muslims to see the divine presence everywhere. Sunnis practice Shariah piety (with a generally more optimistic outlook than that of the Shii) as well as good works. Rather than an Imam, Sunnis rely more on tradition and consensus as a preferred means to establish Islâmic law and doctrine.

Sufism

Sufism – the mystical tradition of Sunni Islam, emerged from Abassid society as a reaction against the growth of jurisprudence (or exterior rules). Sufism was an attempt to return to an *interior* Islam that was the true foundation of the law, with increased tradition of other religious traditions including Christianity. While the Qur'an often described a God of strict justice, Sufis emphasized a God of love.

VI. The Next 1,000 Years

The post caliphate era begins after the death of philosopher Hasan al-Ashari in 728 AD. Islam would reach beyond its original spiritualistic and militaristic roots to become an all-encompassing social and legal system. For about a millennium, Islam would offer the world a beacon of learning and hope – as the major source of innovation and culture in an otherwise dark age.

Post-Caliphates

It is difficult to have an appreciation for the breadth of Islamic culture and influence without considering the great Muslim movements and their leaders. Key dynasties and milestones covering the period 750 to about the turn of the 15th century can be briefly summarized as follows:

- 750-935 *The Abbasids* – started as Shii, than moved to make the caliphate an absolute monarchy. The first caliph Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah massacred all possible Umayyads. Later years involved the consolidation of what would become known as Sunni Islam.
- 874-999 *The Samanids* – were at the core of a Sunni Iranian dynasty together with a corresponding Persian literary renaissance. Abu Nasr al-Farabi (a practicing Sufi) brought Greek philosophy to Islam, elevating politics and proclaiming the triumph of Islam as a rational society without illogical doctrines such as the Trinity.
- In 878, the 12th *Imam disappeared* – known as the Hidden Imam or descendent of the prophet. Previously, the 11th Imam Hasan al-Akari had died in prison in Samarra (Iraq) – a prisoner of the Abassids.
- 912-61 *the Spanish kingdom* – of al Andalus was created. Cordova was a center of learning to 1027. Toledo would fall to the Christian armies of Reconquista in 1085.
- 930-1030 *Shii power re-emerged* – with the Buyids in Iran and Iraq. From 969-1171 the Fatimids were ascendant (as a breakaway Shii faction from the Egyptians) in Tunisia, North Africa, Egypt, and parts of Syria. Cairo emerged as a major center of Muslim learning during this period.
- 976-1118 *The Ghaznavids in north India* – seized power from Iran's Samanids.
- 1054 *final split of eastern (Orthodox) and western (Roman Catholic) churches* – occurred after Emperor Constantine IX demanded that the patriarch of Constantinople acknowledge the authority of Rome. The theological breaking point occurred with the *filioque clause* – which the Latin church added to the Nicene Creed at the 381 Council of Constantinople stating that “We believe in

the Holy Spirit ... who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” Words underlined are the Latin addition, rejected by the eastern church.

- *990-1118 The Seljuk Empire* – curtailed Christian pilgrimages and access to Jerusalem in 1079, with the Byzantine emperor asking for Western Christendom to help against infiltration in 1094.
- *Pope Urban II preached to advocate the First Crusade in 1095* – promising an ‘indulgence’ or complete remission of sins for participants. On their way, Crusaders massacred Jews in German Rhine cities (under belief that Jews of Jerusalem had betrayed that City to the Turks). Over a nearly two century period from 1095 to 1291, six separate crusades took place.
- *1099 Crusaders conquer Jerusalem* – with 30,000 Jews and Muslims massacred in Jerusalem as the Muslim’s first experience with a Christian west just starting to re-emerge from the dark ages. The results would leave a bitter legacy.
- *1187 Saladin defeats Crusaders* – with the crucial encounter at the Battle of Hattin (situated between Tiberias and Jerusalem). Saladin restored Jerusalem to Islam though the Crusaders hung on for another century – until Acre, last of the Latin holdings in Palestine, was lost. The claim has been made by some that most of Islam was relatively unaffected by Crusades. For westerners, the Crusades’ main beneficiary would prove to be the papacy.
- *1220-1391 Mongol raids and destruction* – extending rule north of Caspian and Black Seas and associated conversion of local populations to Islam.⁸ The first Muslim to stop the Mongols was Baibars at Ain Jalut in northern Palestine. By the beginning of the 14th Century, Mongols had largely been converted from Buddhism to Islam (across four separate empires).
- *1369-1405 Tamburlaine (or Timur)* – revived Mongol power in Samarkland, conquered mid-east and Anatolia, and sacked Delhi. However, the empire would disintegrate after his death.

Islamic ascendancy occurred at a time when medieval and Christian Europe was in the grip of a dark age. The reach of Islam extended further in all directions – to Spain, Russia, and India. Islam was associated with education and culture – with major centers of learning in Spain and Egypt. Inspired by papal leadership, Europe made a run at re-establishing a Christian presence in the holy land – and succeed for nearly two centuries but at great cost in lives and aggression.

But even in this time of failure, the seeds of a Christian and European resurgence were being sown. Never again would Islam be so strong.

⁸ The death of Genghis Khan comes early in this period, about 1227.

1492 in Spain

If there is a place that exemplifies the changing winds of fortune, that place is Spain. The year is 1492. This proved to be more than just the year of the (re)-discovery of America. Like Christopher Columbus, three dates are of signal importance for the subsequent development of Islam and Christianity into the current modern era:

- *January 2* – the City-state of Granada was defeated by Ferdinand and Isabella as the last Muslim stronghold in Christendom. Christopher Columbus reportedly was on-hand for this Christian victory. Just a few years later, Muslims in 1499 were given option of conversion or deportation.
- *March 31* – Jews were given an Edict of Expulsion to be baptized or deported. All told, about 80,000 would migrate to Portugal and another 50,000 to Islamic Ottoman Empire.
- *August* – Columbus sets sail for a New World

In a nutshell, Spain would exemplify both the best and worst of the new Christian spirit. As during the Crusades, Christendom would take back ground. But it would do so at great moral peril – extending to our present day.

Three New Islamic Empires

By the early 16th century, Christian Europe was experiencing a new awakening. This was the century of the Protestant reformation and the unleashing of a Western capitalist spirit – not to mention cultural renaissance.

Muslim empires were in transition as well. During this period, three great empires that would bring us to the dawn of the modern era were in ascendance:

- *Ottoman Empire* – covered Asia Minor, Anatolia, Iraq, Syria, and North Africa. The Ottomans were loyal to Sunni Islam. Politics were based on the Shariah or sacred Muslim law. The early Ottomans defeated the Serbs at Kosovo Field in 1389 and in 1402 were overthrown by Tamburlaine (Timur) at the Battle of Ankara. Under Mehmed II, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople (renamed Istanbul) in 1453. This empire would be organized around Byzantine court rituals and with Mongol reliance on the army as the central source of authority. The empire would be dedicated to a *jihad* against enemies of Sunni Islam (west and east). The apogee of power was reached under Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-66) with further conquest of Greece, the Balkans, and Hungary. However, the ambitions of empire were thwarted twice at Vienna, first in 1529 and then again after a failed siege in 1683.
- *Safavid Empire* – took hold over this same period in Iran. The ruling shahs would make Shiism, previously the faith of an elite minority, the religion of the state.

- *Moghul Empire* – developed on the Indian subcontinent, predicated on an all-together different strain of Islam. The Moghuls were tolerant, embracing the universalist philosophical rationalism know as Falsafah plus mystical Sufism. The most visible achievement of the Moghuls is embodied in the architectural masterpiece of the Taj Mahal

All three Islamic empires – the Ottomans, Safavids, and Moghuls – represented early modern institutions. They were governed systematically, with bureaucratic and rational precision

However, all three also essentially expressed a “conservative spirit” in matters both spiritual and temporal. This conservatism thwarted innovation at a time when Europe was coming into its own. The subsequent Muslim reaction to Western ascendancy would later lead to modern fundamentalism as a response to the more liberal and eventually dominant Western ethos.

VII. Into a Modern World

While the focus of this treatise is not on current day conditions of Islam and Christianity, it is all but impossible to avoid a few summary comments.

European colonization of long-standing Islamic countries began with France occupying Algeria in 1830. Anticipating the end of World War I, the 1915 Sykes-Picot agreement divided the territories of the moribund Ottoman empire between England and France (as protectorates). This agreement was received as an “outrage” since provinces of the Ottoman empire had been promised independence.

Ataturk (1881-1938) kept the Europeans at bay and set up the independent, secular state of Turkey – closing madrasahs (colleges), suppressing Sufi orders and forcing men and women to wear modern western dress.

In Egypt, Muhammad Ali and then Jamal Abd al-Nasser (1918-70) led secular states. Nasser was for a time militantly anti-Islamic, suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood. Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) founded Islamic fundamentalism in the Sunni world and executed by Nasser in 1966. This event served as inspiration for more radical Muslims to later assassinate Anwar al-Sadat (1981).

In Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi (reigned 1921-41) deprived the *ulama* (or learned men) of endowments, replaced Shariah Muslim law with a civil system, and forbade Islamic dress and the *hajj* (pilgrimage). The shah was subsequently deposed by the British and replaced by son Muhammad Reza. As the last shah, the rule of Reza would last until the Iranian Revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini (1978-79).

Israel was created at end of British Mandate in 1948 via U.N. declaration.

VII. Epilogue

History begets reality. The story does not end with Islam at its formation, Islam at its peak, or even Islam in some of its more contemporary radical and militant expressions. While both present and future may be largely beyond our direct comprehension, there are three key questions raised by this study. We also make a first pass at possible answers:

1. What parallels and differences are there between the formulation of Christianity & Islam? Both Christianity and Islam share a belief in an all-powerful, omniscient and just God. Both religions (and Judaism) can trace their heritage to a single source – Abraham.

A key difference lies in the relationship between theology and polity. Christianity's early years were those of an often oppressed minority, followed by imperial and cultural ascendancy. In contrast, Islam was expressed militarily and politically as well as spiritually from the time of Muhammad forward. From its early quick cultural ascendancy, Islam subsequently foundered in the post-Renaissance era even as a Christian ethic came into its own as a more global economic and military force.

2. In what ways does the historical development of Islam influence current issues?

While Christians have severed themselves from the Hebraic view of a just and jealous God to that of a loving God, Islam adopts the model of a warrior God in Allah. The secular and the profane are more readily conjoined. However, there are distinct differences in interpretation and resulting cultural values between Shii and Sunni. The Shii is more personal and introspective, the Sunni more outgoing and linked to material success.

3. What is the appropriate response – from the Christian and the Muslim? For the much of the last 1-1/2 millenia, Christian and the Muslim have conflicted – in large part due to mischaracterization of the other's values and cultures. In the name of military and economic conquest, differences have been accentuated and similarities repudiated or ignored.

For the Christian, an appropriate response is to acknowledge if not embrace the similarities. Individuals of faith are focused on the same object of devotion – the singular Allah/God. There may be multiple streams and cross-currents, coursing to enlightenment but with great perils along the way.

For the Muslim, the challenge is to accept the path of the younger Muhammad – the caravan trader, rather than the older and embittered Muhammad – the warrior. Encourage a true marketplace of ideas and ideals where even those who disagree can do so openly and fully respecting the opposing views.

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