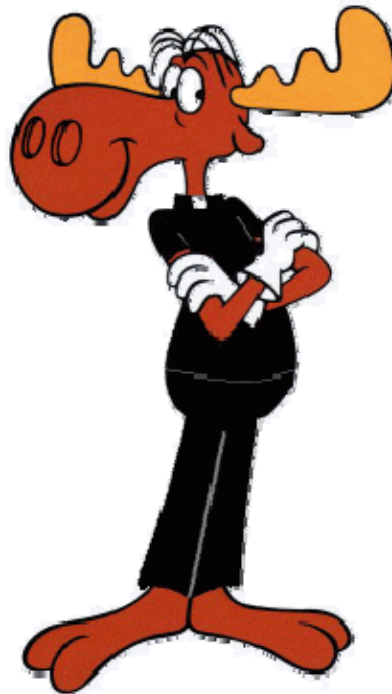

The Reverend Know-it-all
**Looks at Islam
And Christianity**



The Reverend-know-it-all Looks at Islam and Christianity

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Where does Islam come from?

Dear Rev. Know it all,

Where do Muslims and the Muslim religion come from?

Charlene "Chari" A. Law

Dear Charlene,

This is difficult topic, but an important one. First let me say that the issue is not one of better or worse as much as it is one of clear distinctions.

When I was in seminary after the heady days of the council, we were much enamored of theologian Karl Rahner's idea of the "anonymous Christian." He theorized that non-Christians could "accept the salvific grace of God, through Christ, although they may never have heard of the Christian revelation." In other words all good people were Christian whether they knew it or not.

This struck me as a most arrogant idea. "You may think you're a Buddhist, or a Muslim or a Hindu, but you're a nice guy, so you must really be a Christian, even though you don't know it. I suspect that this is still believed by politically correct young liberals who, as they approach the age of 80, still control the diocesan bureaucracies. So it is that our excessively polite society cannot admit that there are people whose ideas are genuinely different from our own. It is dishonest, shallow, and worst of all, disrespectful of other religious frameworks and those who espouse them. To say that all beliefs are essentially the same is as foolish as it is arrogant.

It is more genuinely respectful of Islam to recognize the real differences. From the perspective of Muslims there are things that Christians believe and do that are wrong. From the perspective of Christians, there are things that Muslims believe and do that are wrong. It is not helpful to begin by saying that one is better, the other worse. The

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most useful thing one can do in this multi-cultural mélange in which we modern and progressive westerners live is to know thoroughly and precisely what Islam teaches as well as what Christianity teaches. The inquirer must know as much as possible and make his own decision as to which belief and way of life is preferable, or if neither is.

The original question, “Where do Muslims and the Muslim religion come from?” is very simply answered. Muslims would answer, “From Allah.” (The Arabic word for god, a god, or the gods is “Allah”) It is the word used by Christians as well as Muslims in the Islamic world. For clarity’s sake I will refer to the god worshiped by Muslims as “Allah, using the word “god” for non-Muslim deities, and while I’m at it, Islam is an Arabic word, meaning submission (to Allah) and a Muslim is “one who submits.” There has never been a true religion but Islam. In this sense, Islam pre-dates Muhammad. Thus, Muslims believe that all true prophets are Muslims. Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus are among the Muslim prophets.

Muslims believe that the religions that look to Moses or Jesus as their founder have falsified the teachings of those true prophets. Above all, Jesus is neither a god nor divine. He did not die on the cross, but was hidden away by Allah. The text of the New Testament is a falsification of what Jesus actually said, just as people in the “Jesus Seminar” and some feminists claim. The true Jesus, the Jesus of history preached the pure religion of Allah which was corrupted by the followers of Jesus. So, all true religion is Islam, and all true believers are Muslim.

The answer for non-Muslims is a bit more complicated. In a certain sense Islam is [Muhammad Ibn `Abd Allah Ibn `Abd al-Muttalibh](#), whom Muslims call the apostle and prophet of God, the last and greatest of the prophets, and the most perfect. He is the perfect man, to be imitated in all things. He was born in 570AD in [Mecca](#), a trading city in western Arabia. He was a merchant, and, at 25 married Khadijah, a prosperous widow, fifteen years his senior. Muhammad started to spend time alone in the desert in prayer and meditation and in 610 he told his wife that he’d had a vision of an angel who commanded him to recite: “Proclaim! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created man, out of a clot of congealed blood.....” And so began the series of visions

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and revelations that Muhammad shared with his disciples who in turn wrote them down and which form the Koran.

At first Muhammad thought he was being attacked by a demon, but his wife and her Christian cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, reassured him. Eventually he started to preach one god, Allah and to denounce idolatry. Mecca, in addition to being a trading city, was famous for the [Kaaba](#) -- a cube shaped stone building that housed the many idols worshiped by the pre-Islamic Arabs. Mecca's most important idol was Hubal, placed there by the [Quraysh](#), Muhammad's own tribe.

In 622AD, Muhammad and his little band of followers were forced to flee to Medina, a city north of Mecca. Mecca was a largely Jewish city, and Muhammad saw himself as a restorer of Judaism. Those Jews who did not accept his reform were either executed or expelled from Medina, to which, like Mecca, entrance is prohibited to non- Muslims.

The Muslims and the Meccans continued to skirmish until in 624. At the battle of Badr, Muhammad decisively defeated his own tribe, the Quraysh and executed those most opposed to the Muslims, such as two Quraysh who had dumped a bucket of sheep excrement over him during his days at Mecca. In 628, Muhammad signed a truce with Mecca freeing him to attack the Jewish oasis of Khaybar. He then sent letters to [Heraclius](#), Christian Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, [Khosrau](#) the Zoroastrian Ruler of Persia, the ruler of Yemen and to others, inviting them to except Islam or to suffer the consequences of their stubbornness against Allah's revelation to him. They neither responded nor submitted.

Eventually, in 630, the truce with Mecca broke down and Muhammad attacked with 10,000 troops. After the surrender of the city, he cleansed the Kaaba of its idols, leaving only the Black Rock, possibly a meteor, thought by Muslims to have been placed there by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael, which is there to this day. He declared an amnesty, excluding ten men and women who had mocked him. Of these ten, some were later pardoned, some were executed. Most of Mecca accepted Islam and Muhammad's rule.

To be continued.....

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A Look at Two Tombs

Muhammad continued to extend his conquests through Arabia, personally leading his armies in most cases. He lived a simple life in Medina when he was not out doing battle. He did the usual chores that an Arabian man would do and his life was not ostentatious. In 620, in the midst of his conquests, Muhammad claimed to have traveled to the “farthest mosque” on a flying horse, named Buraq, accompanied and guided by the angel Gabriel. From there he ascended into heaven and was shown hell as well as heaven. He spoke with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and the other early prophets. Some Muslim theologians claim this was spiritual, a vision. Others claim it was an actual physical journey.

In 632, he made his final pilgrimage to Mecca and returned to the home of Aisha, his child bride in Medina. She was quite probably the favorite of his twelve wives. He had married her at the age of 53. She was only nine years old at the time and was the daughter of Abu Baker, Muhammad’s companion in conquest, the first successor, a Caliph of Muhammad. Aisha long survived Muhammad and exerted a powerful influence on Islam. It was her father, Caliph (Successor) Abu Baker who extended the rule of Islam into the Persian and Christian Roman Empires. There in Medina at the home of his beloved Aisha, he came down with a fever and died a few days later on June 8, 632.



As Aisha cradled his head in her lap he asked her to dispose of seven coins, all the wealth he had, and died. He was buried where he died in Aisha’s house and the first two caliphs were buried next to him. There is a fourth tomb next to these three graves which is said to be for Jesus when he eventually dies. He was whisked away to heaven by Allah to await his return to earth where he joined in the battle against the False Messiah. He will rule the Islamic world, die and be buried. The Romans crucified someone else disguised as Jesus, not Jesus himself.

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The story of Jesus is much simpler. Jesus was born in Bethlehem just south of Jerusalem, some 600 years before Muhammad. He was born in cave that was probably the storage space of a small house, where farm animals and implements were kept. It is there to this day. His mother claimed that she'd had a vision of the angel Gabriel and thus her miraculous pregnancy involved no human father. His birth was accompanied by rumors of angels and visits by shepherds and some odd travelers called magi, from Iran. They bore expensive gifts and their presence brought down the wrath of the paranoid Roman-appointed king, Herod the Great. Joseph was forced to take Mary and her baby and flee to Egypt from whence, after a few years, they returned to Nazareth.

He lived a quiet life with his mother Mary, in Nazareth an unremarkable town in Galilee. Nazareth means "Little Shoot" in Hebrew. That about says it all "What good can come from Little Shoot?" Seems to have been a proverb at the time. There couldn't have been more than 200 people in the village, most of them from the old threadbare nobility descended from King David. They thus were mostly relatives of Jesus.

He lived there quietly learning the building and carpentry trade from Joseph who though not his biological father had raised him as a son. He probably worked as a day laborer in Sephoris, two miles from Nazareth where there was plenty of work. His only trips out were probably those taken to Jerusalem for religious festivals. When he was twelve he stayed behind to question the teachers of the law and when they realized he was not in the caravan they rushed back to find him after three days of looking. There he was in conversation with the rabbis.

This was the only thing that seemed to have happened to him since his odd birth that might indicate there was something unusual about the fellow. He was quite undistinguished. He never married and when he was about thirty years old, possibly at his mother's insistence, he was baptized by his cousin John, a radical reformer who had broken with the temple and its priestly establishment. His disciples said that he experienced an overshadowing by the Holy Spirit of God which forced him into the desert.

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After this he began a preaching ministry and gathered disciples and students around him. They claimed that he healed the sick, expelled demons and worked miracles. These things are reported in the memoirs of the disciples and quite possibly in the writings of the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus. He drew the wrath of the temple priests and their political/religious party, the Sadducees who had him executed by means of crucifixion under Roman law, not Jewish, when he was about 33 years old.

His disciples claimed that after three days he rose from the dead and claimed to have seen him risen for a bit longer than a month after his death and supposed resurrection. He told them to announce the forgiveness on sins through the whole world. They held him to be the divine Word, the divine manifestation of the God of the Hebrews.

There are some interesting parallels and interesting differences between Jesus and Muhammad. Both never wrote a book. It was their disciples who wrote down what they said and did. Curiously, Jesus had twelve disciples. Muhammad had twelve wives. Both announced the arrival of Kingdoms. Muhammad announced the Dar al-Islam (House of Islam) which is at unceasing war with the rest of the world known as Dar al-Harb (House of war) until all the world becomes Muslim or at least accepts Islamic rule and superiority.

Muhammad vigorously extended the House of Islam by military means, and commanded his followers to do likewise. Jesus, at his trial, told the Roman governor that his kingdom did not belong to this world. Muhammad was a victorious general. Jesus never even owned a sword. Muhammad never claimed divinity. His title is “the messenger of God.” He did nothing less nor more than deliver God’s message. Jesus, if his followers are to be believed not only claimed divinity he claimed that he WAS God’s message.

Most interesting of all, in both Islam and Christianity the tomb of Jesus is empty. In Islamic belief it is empty because Jesus has not yet occupied it. In Christian belief it is empty, because



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Jesus, though he once occupied it, rose from the dead leaving it forever empty. Muhammad is buried in Medina next to the tomb the Muslims believe Jesus will someday occupy. The tomb in Jerusalem where Christians believe Jesus was laid to rest after his death on the cross is most certainly empty.

I have been in it. I have prayed in it. It is most certainly empty.

Happy Easter.

To be continued.....

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The Sacred Texts

There are, as I said, many similarities between Islam and Christianity, and many substantial differences. A book is very close to the heart of both religions for Islam that book is the Koran and for Christians the Bible, consisting of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

The Bible, strictly speaking, is not a book it is a collection of books all of which Christians believe to be equally inspired, that is “God-breathed.” One part is not necessarily more inspired than the other. The Bible is filled with historical narrative. Many parts of it read like an adventure story.

The Koran is completely different. The Koran has practically no narrative at all. It is simply a collection of sayings, not the sayings of Muhammad but the sayings of Allah. It can be thought of as a non sequential conversation between Allah and Muhammad by means of the Angel Gabriel. It is not the speaking of any man nor the opinion of any man. It is Allah who is the speaker and as such, the book should not be interpreted, or in the view of some, even translated from the very poetic, complex and ancient Arabic in which Allah first spoke it. To change the book is to change the speaking of Allah, and as such is blasphemous.

Christians, on the other hand are always translating and amending the translation and reworking the text as better ancient scrolls are found. In Islam this sort of treatment for the Koran would be unthinkable. Muhammad never wrote anything. The same is true of Jesus. His followers would remember or write down the things that Allah had told Muhammad and these were collected by them after Muhammad’s death in 632.

They are not necessarily written down in the order in which they were spoken by Allah to Muhammad. This is important to remember. Much hinges on when apparently conflicting verses of the Koran were written. In addition to the Koran, there exist texts called the Hadiths, or acts and sayings of Muhammad that teach the Muslim way of life.

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They were set down about a century after the death of Muhammad, and there is dispute about which Hadiths are authentic. The Hadiths in no way are comparable to the Koran, but they support it. There are some words of Allah in the Hadiths which some Muslims hold on the level of the Koran, but in Islam the Koran stands alone. Muhammad was simply speaking for Allah. He put none of his own opinions in the text.

For instance the 4th chapter (surah), 34th verse of the Koran says:

“Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Surely God is high, supreme.”

This is not Muhammad’s opinion. This is Allah’s opinion, if one may say it that way. It is the infallible and unchangeable speaking of Allah. It cannot be interpreted, modernized or nuanced. It is the divine command. On the other hand, the precise nature of the veiling of women is not made clear in the Koran, though it is clear in the verse quoted that women should be veiled. The Hadiths indicate that Muhammad taught a woman should show only her face and hands. The authenticity of each Hadith is discussed and there is room for interpretation regarding the Hadiths, and thus the nature of the veiling of women. That is why you see so many forms of the hijab, or veiling.

There is another very interesting similarity between Christianity and Islam, the doctrine of abrogation or “*naskh*.” Surah 2:106 says, “None of Our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but we substitute something better or similar. Knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?” This means that nothing abrogates the Koran except the Koran. Naskh (abrogation) is a kind of gradual revelation.

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Allah revealed his truth to Muhammad over the course of 20 years, gradually introducing Muhammad and his followers to more difficult and fuller truths. The problem with this is the dispute over the chronology of the verses. If one verse seems to contradict another, it is only an appearance because the later and fuller verse abrogates the earlier verse. The time at which a word was received by Muhammad is thus a matter of the greatest importance.

Which came first, Sura 8.12 which says, "Remember thy lord has inspired the angels with the message. Give firmness to the believers and instill terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. Smite them above their necks and smite the fingertips of them," or "Let there be no compulsion in religion" Surah 2:256? It's a rather important question. Surah 9:5 is called the "Verse of the Sword" and has caused no end of controversy. "When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful."

Some Muslim modernists insist that verse applies only to the battle of Badr, but the history of Islam is in fact one of unremitting war. The general rule of thumb is that the earlier verses of the Koran revealed in Mecca are superseded by those revealed later at Medina. When the Muslims were still at Mecca they were too few in number to make war. When they were at Medina, they were better organized and stronger and thus Allah revealed his plan for the conquering armies of Islam and his goal of making the world subject to Sharia (Islamic Law) revealed in the Koran. The direction of abrogation is from word to sword, from critique to warfare.

Christianity too, has a kind of doctrine of abrogation, the New Testament abrogating the old. Jesus explain this in his teaching on divorce. Matthew 19:8 "Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.'" What had been allowed in the covenant of Sinai was not to be allowed in the covenant of Calvary. The covenant of Calvary is

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meant to return Christians to the primeval innocence of the Garden of Eden.

Thus Christians don't stone adulterers or sorcerers, though this is commanded in the Law of Moses. They don't permit divorce and above all don't permit any violence that is not clearly self defense. The Christian form of abrogation is a turning away from violence. Christianity too has its own verses of the sword. When Jesus was being arrested he refused to let his disciples defend him. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to (Peter) him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword." And again: Matt 5:38, 39 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'" This abrogates Deuteronomy 19:21, "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." The Koran seems to side with Deuteronomy. (Surah42:42) "But there is no blame on those who defend themselves after they have been wronged." This is amplified by Surah 2:193: "Persecution is worse than slaughter." This is usually taken to mean that religious persecution is the greatest offense and the greatest grounds for violent action.

So we share the concepts of Sacred Scripture and the concept of abrogation, but in these ideas Islam and Christianity are as different from each other as can be. There is very clearly a sword at the heart of Islam while there is a cross at the heart of Christianity.

To be continued.....

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Missionaries, Religion and Government

Another thing that Christianity and Islam have in common is that they are both missionary religions with claims to universal truth. The methods by which they both exercise this universal claim are significantly different. Allah establishes a universal government for the well being of humanity, called the Caliphate. It is the will of Allah that every human being be subject to Islamic Law and to Islamic government. Allah intends to bring unity and peace to the world by means of one legal code, called Sharia. On the other hand, Jesus said to Pilate that “My kingdom is not of this world.” Most Christian thinkers would agree that government by practicing Christians would be a fine thing, but they might not necessarily want a Christian government.

At the end of the first century (100AD) there were certainly no more than 100,000 Christians and the figure was probably more like 10,000 or 20,000 in the Roman Empire of 70 Million. I am not very numerically inclined, but either figure is certainly much less than one percent. Two hundred years later, Christians comprised at least ten percent of the empire’s population, perhaps more and was the majority religion in a few places. This, despite concerted efforts by the Roman state to eliminate the Church. The faith had also spread east in the Persian Empire and by the year 300 was well established in places as distant as Germany in the north to Ethiopia in the south and from Spain in the west to India in the east. It was persecuted everywhere yet grew everywhere.

There seems to have been three elements involved in the growth of Christianity. The first was its claim to miracles. [St. Gregory the Wonder Worker](#) is a good example of early Christian evangelism. Gregory was born in 213 AD in Caesarea, the capital of Pontus in what now is northern Turkey, on the shore of the Black Sea. As the name suggests he was a worker of miracles. When he began his ministry there were seventeen Christians in town, but at his death there were only seventeen non-Christians! His ability to work miracles, especially the casting out of demons and the healing of the sick won the area to Christ. You may think this is nothing but primitive superstition, but the Catholic Church has always spread by means of miracles. In the 20th century, there are such examples as Venerable [Solanus Casey](#) of Detroit, [St. Andre](#)

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[of Montreal](#) and [St. Pio of Pietralcina](#). Look 'em up. They worked miracles like some people work a crowd. I have a cousin who was healed by Solanus Casey of a mastoid bone infection that needed immediate surgery in the days before antibiotics. This was in the late 1930's in Detroit when she was only 6. He cured her with a touch. The surgery was cancelled and she still is in great shape.

Saint Andre was a distant cousin to my sister-in-law and his miracles were pretty much daily fare in her childhood home. Lourdes, Fatima, St. Ann de Beaupre, are healing shrines. Who has time to mention them all? Christianity was spread and is maintained by things that most people would regard as supernatural or simply unbelievable. I have a friend, a Korean deacon, whose family became Christian when his uncle was healed by the anointing of the sick. The faith has caught fire in Korea and in China in the current era, because of healing. Sub-Saharan Africa is fast becoming the new heartland of Christianity because of Pentecostal/Charismatic preaching of which miraculous claims are an integral part. It was and it remains Christianity's claim to the supernatural that has caused it to be the world's majority religion. Christian states and Christian armies had nothing to do with it.

Christianity was an outlaw religion for the first 300 years of its existence. The faith was illegal until the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD. It did not become the state religion of the Roman Empire until 380 AD. Until that point, forced conversion by a government or a Christian army was unthinkable among Christians. However..... the newly-Christianized emperors of Rome had no problem with the idea. Subsequent Christian kings and rulers have, on occasion, followed the example of the Byzantine/Roman emperors with gusto. It doesn't work very well. Take Mexico, one of the world's most fervently Catholic countries. [St. Juan Diego](#)'s vision of our Blessed Mother at Tepeyac converted the indigenous Mexican people to Christianity a whole lot more effectively than did Spanish steel. As far as I know, there is only one Christian state in existence today: the Vatican. There is certainly one Christian army: 135 Swiss Guards. They probably engender more giggles than fear with their halberds, helmets and striped pantaloons, but since Mehmet Ali Agca tried to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981, their practical use as a papal bodyguard has become far less quaint.

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Islam does not claim the miracles that Christianity does. The beauty and poetry of the Koran is considered the greatest miracle of Islam, especially in consideration of Muhammad's lack of literacy. It is simply not true that Islam originally spread by forced conversion. There is no call to spread Islam by forced conversion in the Koran as far as I can tell. The mandate of Allah is that Sharia -- Islamic law -- become the universal law of the world. Sharia allows "people of the book", Christian, Jews and Sabians, whoever they may be, to practice their religion, with a few conditions. They must pay a special tax called the *jizyah*. Muslims pay *zakat*, which means charitable donation, and the *khums*, a separate assessed tax. The amount of these taxes is calculated differently in different times and different places. In order to practice their own religion, the peoples of the book must pay a different kind of tax, *jizyah*, more properly a "tribute," something paid by conquered peoples. You might say, "What's the difference? Muslims pay *zakat* and *khums*. Christian and Jews pay *jizyah* in the Muslim state." In reality the fees levied on non-Muslims were considerably larger than the tax on Muslims and thus, conversion to Islam brought tax relief. The *jizyah* was sometimes double the taxes on Muslims.

Muslim legal opinion teaches that the *Dhimmi*, the non-Muslim who is allowed to practice his religion, must be made to feel subjected when he paid the *jizyah*. He must be bowed with eyes to the floor when he paid. In certain places and times it was considered appropriate to symbolically slap the *Dhimmi* (non-Muslim) when he paid his *jizyah* (tribute tax). For those whom poverty made unable to pay the tax, the only recourse was conversion, imprisonment or slavery. The *Dhimmi*, permitted non-Muslim, is restricted in his dress, the height he can build his house, the walls around his house, the jobs he may take, the types of animals he may ride. (Only donkeys and mules, no camels or horses) He cannot have religious schools for his children, nor can he repair his churches or build new ones. A *Dhimmi* may have no religious signs or symbols in his home or church or on his person that can be seen by a Muslim. Friendship with non-Muslims is explicitly forbidden by the Koran. In addition, the children of non-Muslims are fair game for conversion to Islam. Beginning as early as about 1350 AD, the Ottoman Turks would take the most promising of Christian subjects, aged between 10 and 12.

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They would be taught the Turkish language and the religion of Islam. They were then drafted as Janissaries, the elite troops of the Caliph, the Ottoman Sultan.

The effect of these restrictions were the gradual conversion of the subjected peoples to Islam, primarily by means of tax relief, whether that tax be one's money or one's children. There were some stubborn hold outs against the religion of Allah, like the devoutly Christian Copts in Egypt and Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Assyrians, Armenians, Georgians, Chaldeans, Lebanese, Maronites and Malachites and the Greek Orthodox and the Palestinian Christians who are the descendants of the very first Christians, and in our times, it is estimated that some 2,000,000 (two million) Catholics among other Christians have been killed for resisting Sharia in the Southern Sudan. The world is divided into two parts especially in the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence: Dar al-Islam, (the House of Islam) and Dar al-Harb (House of war). Despite 2000 years of *Dhimmi* restrictions, the Christians of the House of Peace have continued to profess Christ.

Oh, by the way, there is dispute about whether or not to include Hindus, Buddhists and a few others as people of the book. This is significant because if you aren't a person of the book, you must convert or die. So you see Islam is not spread by the sword. Islamic law is spread by the sword. One must be precise in one's definitions, mustn't one?

To be continued...

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The Faith and Women

The place of women is significantly different in Islam and Christianity. At first glance comparing Muhammad and Jesus, there doesn't seem to be much difference in their treatment of women. Both Jesus and Muhammad had significant dealings with women. Jesus had women followers who provided for his needs and Muhammad was greatly influenced, as I've mentioned by his first wife [Khadijah](#) who convinced him that his revelations were heavenly and not demonic. His third wife, the child bride [Aisha](#), was called his most beloved wife and seems to have had great authority after Muhammad's death, but it seems that after the initial period of Islam, it becomes an absolutely male religion. Whereas women, though not ordained, are as important as men in the theology and leadership of the Church.

The [Sahih al-Bukhari](#) is one of the six canonical [hadith](#) collections of Sunni Islam. In it we read of a conversation between Muhammad and some women: "Once Allah's Apostle went out to offer the prayer... He passed by the women and said, 'O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you women.' They asked, 'Why is it so, O Allah's Apostle?' He replied, 'You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.' The women asked, 'O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?' He said, 'Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?' They replied in the affirmative. He said, 'This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?' The women replied in the affirmative. He said, 'This is the deficiency in her religion.'"

One might counter that Christianity, at least traditional forms, regards women as deficient in religion because women are not ordained to the priesthood. In fact the monastic orders elevate women to positions of great prominence. Women as well as men have positions of great influence in the Church. Popes and bishops on occasion are reprimanded by women. Take for example [St. Catherine of Sienna](#) and in our times, [Mother Angelica](#) and [Mother Teresa of Calcutta](#) (Not that she reprimanded, but she

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most certainly advised and did so quite strongly). It is incontrovertible that Muhammad veiled women and counted them as less than men. (Koran 4:11 regarding inheritance) “The male shall have the equal of the portion of two females.” (Koran 2:282, regarding court testimony) “And call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not found then a man and two women.” (Koran 2:228) “and the men are a degree above them [women]”

(Koran 2:223 regarding the relationship between men and women) “Your wives are as a tilth (fertile farm field) unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will..” and (Koran 4:3) “Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four...” And very interestingly, (Koran53:27) regarding the gender of angels: “Those who believe not in the Hereafter, name the angels with female names.” In Islam, angels are male. The very concept of heaven is one of a garden of male pleasure. Muslim apologists try to refute this by saying that the pleasures of heaven will apply to women too, because they will desire no one but their husbands. Men are promised as many beautiful women as they may want, as well as boys to serve them (Koran 76:19) “There will circulate among them young boys made eternal. When you see them, you would think them scattered pearls.” The meaning of the eternal boys is unclear. The case can be made that they are only servants. Homosexuality in Islamic Law is usually punished by death, though imprisonment and whipping is prescribed under certain circumstances. The same is true for adultery. Under certain circumstances the punishment is flogging and house arrest for life, in others it is death by stoning.

In this world, a man is permitted as many as four wives, and certain Islamic sects allow for something called temporary marriage, allowing what Christians would call “an affair.” Muhammad, in view of his unique role in Islam was given a special privilege. He was allowed more than four wives and is thought to have married 12 women, by some counts more. By a special dispensation from Allah, Muhammad was allowed to take his adopted son’s wife for himself. These concessions were uniquely for Muhammad, and not applicable to other Muslims. As all Muslim men, he was allowed slave-concubines of whom he had six.

Women are generally thought to be under the protection, and thus under the control

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of men in Islamic society. A woman generally may not marry without the consent of her guardian. [Imam Malik](#), one of the four great Imams of the Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, interprets Koran 2:232 to mean that the choice of partner by a Muslim woman is subject to the over-ruling power (“ijbar”) of her father or her guardian in the interests of the woman herself, and the legal guardian of a woman may annul the marriage of a woman made without her permission. The need for the marital interests of a woman to be supervised and protected by a male guardian is made clear in the two different forms of divorce which is allowed in Islam, though not encouraged. A man may divorce his wife by repudiating her three times. This is called “talaq.” A woman may also divorce her husband, but in order to do so she must request the divorce, called “khula,” from her husband. If he refuses to allow her to divorce, she must obtain a judgment of divorce from an Islamic judge, called a “qadi,” who is, of course, a man

For traditional Christians divorce is absolutely forbidden, though in certain cases a marriage may be recognized as invalid. In Christian thought marriage is indissoluble because it has a symbolic meaning. It symbolizes the union of the Messiah and the Church for eternity. Unlike Islam, the ecstatic union of husband and wife is a foreshadowing of the perfect spiritual union of heaven. There will, however, be no carnal desire in heaven. Jesus, who never seems to have married while in this world, taught rather that “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” (Matt.22:30)

Marriage is an important symbol for the Christian heaven, describing the relationship of the Messiah and his Church. In Islam male sexual relationships seem to be part of the substance of heaven. For Christians there is ultimately no distinction between men and women. St. Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28)

Eternal life and the role of gender couldn’t be more different in the founding texts of the two religions, and in the lives of their respective founders.

To be continued...

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Slavery and Change

We like to believe that slavery was a passing thing and that humanity has outgrown it. Don't be so sure. We have definite archeological evidence for slavery going back to 8,000 B.C. and at the date of the present writing, there are numerically more slaves than at any other time in history.

As we enter the 21st century there are perhaps 20 to 30 million slaves in the world. Historically there are a few ways to become slaves. One can be born into slavery be enslaved as a captive of war or kidnapping, be enslaved as a punishment for crime or be enslaved for non-payment of debt. All these forms of enslavement, though universally outlawed are practiced at the present time. Governments turn a blind eye to the problem throughout the whole world, including the U.S. Government.

The U.S. does not permit slavery. It simply allows the import of the labor of slaves. There are slaves who are forced to work sugar plantations in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Brazil. There are thought to be as many as 10,000 slaves in the United States, mostly held against their will for purpose of prostitution. There are at least a few hundred thousand slaves in India, principally children who are locked in factories. There are prisoners in China forced to work as slaves as well as outright human trafficking, but the great majority of modern slaves are found in Islamic countries, principally the Sudan. (Black African Christians captured in war).

In Bangladesh, one of the world's poorest countries, indentured servitude, (also called bond slavery or enslavement for debt) is common and Bangladeshi slaves are found as far away as Yemen and Malaysia. And of course our friend and ally, Saudi Arabia denies that it permits slavery, but I know all sorts of people who have relatives and friends, especially Filipinas, who have gone for work in Saudi Arabia only to find that they are not allowed to leave and are at the whim of their Saudi master. Our other friend and ally, Pakistan, is one of the great slave holding countries of the modern world. The estimates of the number of child bond slaves in Pakistan is anywhere from 2 million to 20 million. They are forced to make things as diverse as carpets and surgical

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instruments for export. A Pakistani child is thought to be able to stitch three footballs a day.

There is a chance that your carpets, your expensive designer athletic shoes, your sporting goods, your tables and chairs, your clothes, the sugar in your coffee are made by modern slaves, often children, most of them in the Dar al Islam, the World of Peace. So friends, you and I mustn't feel too enlightened or superior. We are no better than slave holders. We are too arrogant to have slaves ourselves. We simply enjoy the cheap luxury goods that are made with their sweat, their blood and their tears.

There is a very subtle and very important difference between Christianity and Islam regarding slavery. Both religions assume that slavery is a natural phenomenon.

The Koran actually discourages slavery, and the freeing of slaves is considered a meritorious act. Muhammad freed 67 of his own slaves. He did however seem to have kept some women slaves as concubines. No Muslim can have relations with a woman to whom he is not married, except with a concubine who is, in fact, a slave. There is no penalty for relations with an enslaved woman, either for her or for the man involved. (Koran 33:50) "O Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowries; and those (slaves) whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee." And we read in the Hadith (Bukhari 34:351) "A man decided that a slave of his would be manumitted after his death and later on he was in need of money, so the Prophet took the slave and said, 'Who will buy this slave from me?' Nu'aim bin 'Abdullah bought him for such and such price and the Prophet gave him the slave."

So Muhammad both owned and sold slaves. Still, he freed many slaves and in Islam no free born Muslim can be enslaved. One born as a slave, even though a Muslim, doesn't have to be freed, and anyone captured in battle can be enslaved. A person who is not in one of the permitted religions faces death, slavery or conversion as the only possible options if captured in Holy War. In short, the freeing of slaves is meritorious but not required.

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At first glance Christianity seems to have very little to say about slavery. It is acknowledged as legal, but in his letter to Philemon, Paul urges his friend to free the slave, Onesimus, which Philemon apparently did. Onesimus is thought to be the third bishop of Ephesus. St. Callistus (217-222) the 16th pope, started out life as a slave at a time when the Roman world believed slavery was an indelible blot on the character, even if the slave were eventually freed. Slavery in the ancient world was part of the social contract. "You should have fought harder in the battle and rather have been killed than captured." "You shouldn't have put yourself and your children up as collateral for a debt." The free man would respectably kill himself rather than be enslaved.

So you see, if you were a slave it was your own fault and the fault of your slavish nature. Still, slavery was not an impediment to St. Callistus' election as bishop of the growing Roman Church, because in the Church all were slaves and none were slaves. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."(Gal.3:28) The title "slave" (Greek: "*doulos*") was an honor among Christians. The Blessed Mother and St. Paul both call themselves slaves. Jesus himself is called a slave in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians "(Jesus), being in very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave." (Phil. 2:6, 7)

Slavery continued, though diminished in the Byzantine, Eastern Christian Empire. It continued, but was very actively discouraged in Western Europe, only to be replaced by serfdom. Slavery in early medieval Europe was still common enough that the Roman Catholic Church repeatedly prohibited it, especially the sale of Christian slaves to non-Christian lands. Non-Christian slaves taken in war were permitted with the exception of enslavement for reasons of race or nationality which were expressly forbidden first in 1435 by Pope Eugene IV regarding *Guanches*, the indigenous inhabitants of the Canary Islands and by Pope Paul III (1534) in reference to the indigenous inhabitants of the newly discovered Americas. Ultimately, slavery has largely disappeared where Christians are the majority, but it continues and seems to be growing in parts of the Muslim world.

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The ending of slavery in the Christian world is a good window into one of the prime differences between Christianity and Islam. Some Christians speak of the development of doctrine. Most Catholics prefer the term, the “unfolding” of doctrine. Understanding and applying the teaching of Jesus and the meaning of His words in new situations is an integral part of Christian life. Take, for example, the phenomenon of WWJD bracelets, the letters standing for “What Would Jesus Do.” A traditional Christian may just as easily ask, “What Does Jesus Want Me to Do?” The visionary experience is alive and well in the Christian world, believing that the Holy Spirit still speaks, not giving new revelations, but reminding believers of what has been revealed and applying that revelation to the present situation.

There is a saying among Muslims, that “the gates of *Ijtihad* are closed.” *Ijtihad* is the making of a decision in Islamic law by an individual. For most Muslims, the revelation and the interpretation of that revelation is absolutely complete as of around 900AD. There can be no new law or new interpretation. This is much more significant than it first appears. Christianity has nothing to compare with the structure of Islamic law. Islamic law dictates what one wears, what one eats and drinks, whom one marries and just about every other area of life. Islamic law is revealed and is divine in its inspiration. Christian law is much less detained. It is limited to certain moral principles and must be fleshed out in the societies where the Christian finds himself. There are basic laws and principles, but most Christians cannot be known by what they eat, by what they wear, or how they look. Even the extensive codes of Canon Law, common in Western and Eastern churches, are commonly reworked and changed. It is human law based on the need of the church in a particular era. It is not thought to be divine in its origin.

The closing of *Ijtihad* has to do with the nature of both Muhammad and the Koran. The Koran is the unchanging, infallible word of God. It is not the expression of a man, but of Allah. It cannot be questioned or changed in anyway. In fact, most Muslim scholars are uncomfortable even with its translation into modern languages. To translate something is to change it. Allah did not say anything in English or French or even modern Arabic. He said it in classical Arabic and to translate even into a more contemporary Arabic is to change it, and thus it is impossible to have a real

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understanding of divine revelation if one does not take the trouble to learn classical Arabic.

Muhammad is the perfect man, Al-Insan Al-Kamil. To do what Muhammad did is always moral. The content of Islamic faith and law cannot be changed in any way since the beginning of the Islamic era. It cannot be improved on, or restated or accommodated in any way. What Muhammad did, the Muslim should do. As Muhammad prayed, the Muslim should pray. As Muhammad fought, the Muslim should fight. As Muhammad lived, so the Muslim should live. And so on. Muhammad is worthy of imitation in all things. It is impossible to absolutely change things like child marriage, concubinage, slavery and religious war. They may diminish, but they cannot be outlawed, because to do so would be to impugn the perfection of the prophet of Allah. With the exception of more than four wives at one time and the authoritative speaking of inspired revelation, all that he did the Muslim man may and should do.

There is still one more implication of the perfection of the Koran and its prophet and the closing of Ijtihad that is very much misunderstood by the liberal governments of the West. Heaven knows that at different times and places in the West, there have been slavery, child brides and religious war, and these things are not what separates the West and the Islamic world absolutely. The most difficult thing for Westerners to understand is that, in a fully Islamic society, an elected legislature is morally wrong. No such thing existed in Islam until the arrival in the East by the liberal ideas of the French revolution.

Christianity has always had a balance between election and delegation. Abbots, abbesses, popes and bishops are all chosen by a process that involves both election and delegation. They, in turn, make the changeable laws of the Church and apply unchangeable divine law to the current need. The Church is not much concerned with civil law, unless that law demands that the believer violate divine law. In Islam, civil law is religious and religious law is civil. Muhammad was a ruler of an earthly state, and his Successors followed his example.

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Here is the point: As far as the Muslim is concerned, no elected body can make law! Only Allah can make law and he has done so in the Koran. These laws were fleshed out by the first four, or rightly guided Caliphs (Successors) and to attempt to make new law and new interpretation is blasphemous. Our attempts to impose Western style democracy on an Islamic world are utterly futile. Law is made only by Allah and its interpretation is a theological task, not a civil or secular one. The governments of America and Europe are fooling themselves to think that Islam is modernizing. If it modernizes it ceases to be Islam. The depth of understanding of Islam by most Western leaders is so shallow as to be laughable. The belief that, "Muslims are really just like us and want what we want" is both absurd and insulting to Muslims.

To be continued.....

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History, Nominalism, the *Shahadah* and the Lord's Prayer

So, Charlene, this letter could go on indefinitely. The comparison of two such rich traditions is practically inexhaustible, but I imagine you and anyone else who reads this is close to exhaustion with the effort. There are so many things yet to compare.

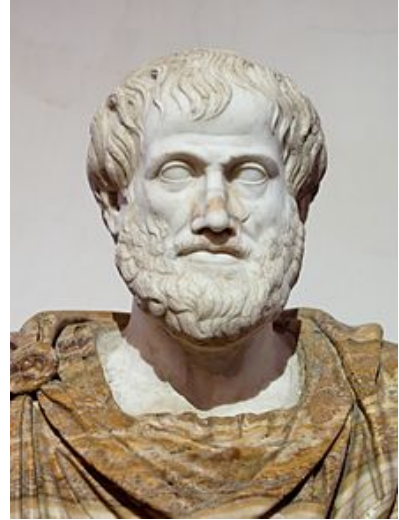
Poetry is one of the great Arabic arts, but strangely not music. Music is central to Christian worship, but has almost no place in the Muslim liturgy beyond the Muezzin's call to prayer. Theater and even musical notation developed in the Christian world and in more recent times have entered into the Muslim world. Orchestral and Symphonic music has yet to make a dent in the world of Islam. Islamic calligraphy is exquisite, but beyond that there is no portraiture and certainly no sculpture. Things that we in the West regard as normal visual arts are forbidden.

History is essential to the educated Christian. The monks of Christian Europe carefully preserved the pre-Christian pagan traditions, believing that all cultures, no matter how disparate, were expressions of human longing for and reflection of the divine. There is no truth that is not of interest to Christian scholarship. Islamic scholarship has no interest in the non-Islamic roots of its culture. When the science of archaeology was in its infancy, Muslims thought it pretty amusing that all those Englishmen and Germans were so intrigued by piles of old stones. What good were they? The ruins of ages past had and have no appeal for devout Muslims.

In fact most orthodox Muslims would deny that they have any roots that are non-Islamic. History starts with Muhammad. There was a period in the beginning of the Islamic period when this was not true, but Islamic scholarship made the decision around 1200 AD, that what was not in the Koran and the Hadith were not worth learning. If Allah thought them important, he would have mentioned it.

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The particular effect of this decision is incalculable for a very simple reason: Aristotle! From Aristotle we *dhimmis* in the *Dar al Harb* -- the non-Islamic world -- learned one very simple idea. The world is real. At exactly the time that Islamic scholars, most particularly al-Ghazali, the great Muslim Jurist (born in Iran 1058, died 1111) were denying that Greek philosophy had anything to offer Islam. Thomas Aquinas, an Italian priest of the Dominican order (1225-1274), was using Aristotelian methods to explain Christianity. Aquinas became the guide of Christianity and Western culture until my youth. As a result Aristotle was taught in every Catholic university and seminary for perhaps 600 years.



Aristotle taught that things were real. That may not seem very important to you if you are a westerner, but there are countless religions that believe the world is a sort of illusion. The investigation of the world around us is therefore of limited value. If things are real, they are worth investigating. Enter science and the scientific method. (If you are curious about this, may I suggest the book "[Aristotle's Children](#)" by Richard E. Rubenstein, Harvest Books, 2003)

There is a philosophy called [nominalism](#). It holds that something is what it is only because it is so called. This belief extends into the world of religion; God becomes the great nominalist. Things are so because He says they are so. Hence, the world exists only as an illusion, and God being absolutely sovereign could forget about the world and, Poof! No more world. The same applies to morality. Murder, theft, adultery, all wrong because God says so. If one morning the Almighty decided that murder and theft and adultery were fine things, well, they would from that point on be fine things. He is after all, sovereign.

There is a classic question asked by philosophers and irritating third-graders, "Can God make a stone so big He Himself could not move it?" The Islamic answer would be, of course He is God. He can do whatever He wants. The Catholic and Jewish answer is, "Certainly not!" Creation itself is a reflection of God and to think that God could and

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would change His mind about existence is to think that one could stand in front of a mirror, raising one's arm and expect the arm reflected in the mirror to remain un-raised.

God has no limits or law beyond Himself, but He is His own law, and as the Christian scriptures say "He cannot deny Himself." (2 Tim2:13). This extends to moral law, or natural law. The Ten Commandments are not arbitrary -- they are reflections of the very nature of God, who is perfect existence. There are lots of liturgical and religious laws that can change, but the essential natural law that is available to all humanity and is expressed in the Ten Commandments. This belief that God is not creation, but at the same time is not divorced from creation brings us to the great the deepest and the most insurmountable difference between Islam and Christianity: the Fatherhood of God.

Shortly after the Muslims conquered the Christian city of Jerusalem in 638 AD they built the [Dome of the Rock](#), the golden dome that one sees in so many pictures of Jerusalem.(691) It was built to keep Muslims from being seduced by the beauty of Constantine's church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulcher) with its shining golden dome. The Dome of the Rock was built on the site of the temple of Solomon, and was intended to make a powerful statement that Islam was restoring the religion of Abraham without its Jewish and Christian additions. Inside, in truly beautiful Arabic calligraphy around the dome is written "He (Allah) begets not nor was he begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him. Allah has no companion." (Koran 19:35-37)

God is absolutely alone. He has no son, and has no need of companions. There could not be a clearer juxtaposition of the deepest difference between the God of Christianity and Allah. The God of Jesus is love. The God of Muhammad is other. He is faceless, he is sovereign, he is not bounded by love law or reason. The God of Jesus is bounded by His sacrificial love for His creation, humanity in particular. He has stooped to love us with real love, love unto death.

The central prayer of Muhammad and Islam is the [Shahadah](#): "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." The central prayer of Jesus is the Our Father. "Our Father who are in heaven..." The very prayer "Our Father" is a form of *shirq* in Islam. *Shirq* is to place partners alongside God. *Shirq* is an unforgivable crime.

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God may forgive any sin except for *shirq*. It is a sentence of damnation to die in a state of *shirq*.

In other words, to say the Our Father, to claim divinity not only for Jesus, but, at least potentially for all humanity makes one worthy of eternal death and hellfire. To reconcile the Christian world with the Muslim world, the prayer "Our Father" must be obliterated.

Next week, some of the myths of history!

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Some truth about things “Everybody Knows...”

There are quite a number of myths about Islam that are popular in the West. Let's talk first about the Crusades. The myth is that the aggressive West invaded the Islamic world which was minding its own business. Quite the opposite is true. The Crusades were a response to the Islamic invasion of Europe and the whole Christian world.

In 711, less than a century after the death of Muhammad, Muslim Arabs, called Saracens at the time, conquered Spain in just a few years. They continued into France as far as Tours in the north where they were finally stopped in 732 by the Franks (a Catholic Germanic Tribe then living in Northern France), led by [Charles Martel](#), the deputy of the Frankish King. The Muslim invaders established the [Caliphate of Cordoba](#), which included territory in France around the city of Narbonne, and were not pushed back into Spain until 759. Charles Martel's grandson, [Charlemagne](#), or Charles the Great, finally started the re-conquest of Spain which only ended in 1492, just a few months before Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue, a period of 781 years!

Part of the popular myth is that Islamic Spain was a paradise of tolerance and diversify. Medieval Christians of what is now Spain and Portugal were constantly under the threat of Muslim raids. For example, in an attack against Lisbon, in 1189, the caliph Yaqub al-Mansur captured 3,000 women and children who were subsequently enslaved and did the same in Silves in 1191, taking 3,000 more Christian slaves. The [Almohads](#), a Muslim dynasty founded in the 12th century, dominated northern Africa and southern Spain. They were Muslim fundamentalists who believed that Christianity was to be eliminated by unremitting war. The only choices they gave both Jews and Christians in southern Spain were death or conversion. Jews and Christians fled, including [Maimonides](#), the great Jewish physician and thinker. He and other Jews fled east to Egypt while Christians fled north to the small Christian kingdoms. It is a pure myth that everyone got along. When they were tolerated, Jews and Christians had Dhimmi status. When they were not tolerated they were simply killed or converted.

The same invasion that had struck Spain, Portugal and France also struck Italy. In [846, Islamic invaders plundered St. Peter's Basilica and St. Paul's Outside the Walls](#),

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but were unable to take the whole city of Rome which was still protected by its ancient walls. The Italians resisted but Sicily, Malta, and parts of southern Italy were conquered by the Saracens (Muslim Arabs) and remained part of the Islamic world until 1091 when the (Christian) Normans finally ousted them and set up their own kingdom.

When Muhammad died in 632, the Holy Land had been a largely Christian country for 300 or perhaps 400 years. When the Romans were still pagan in about 132AD, they had put down the Jewish revolution led by Bar Kochba and they subsequently killed or exiled much of the Jewish population. The land became essentially Greek and largely Christian, especially after the conversion of the Romans to Christianity.

Muslim invaders arrived in 633, but the majority population of the Holy Land remained Christian until probably the late 900's when the Fatimid [Caliph Hakim](#) (called "Hakim the Crazy") decided that, after 600 years, it was time to rid the Holy Land of Christians. In 1009, Hakim ordered the churches of the Holy Land, about 3,000 in number destroyed, including the church of the Holy Sepulcher, the holiest pilgrimage shrine in the Christian world.

Can you imagine what would happen if Christians today even talked about the destruction of the *Kaaba* in Mecca? Two Muslim factions, the Fatimids and the Seljuk Turks were locked in a struggle for control of the Islamic world and Jerusalem was caught in the middle back and forth between them. In 1056 hundreds of Christians were expelled from Jerusalem and pilgrimage to Jerusalem was forbidden. In 1077 the Jews and Christians of Jerusalem were massacred by Emir [Atsiz ibn Uvaq](#), in retaliation for an uprising against the Seljuk government. Already by 1063, Pope Alexander II had given his blessing to Spanish Christians in their war against the Muslims.

When a cry for help came from the Byzantines in Constantinople who were also threatened by the latest wave of Muslim invaders, the Seljuk Turks, [Pope Urban II](#) sent out the call to rescue fellow Christians from the invaders and to recover the Christian lands lost to Muslim aggression since 630 AD.

The closing of pilgrimage, the slaughter of Christians, the destruction of the Christian's holiest shrine and the prospect of continuing Muslim slave raids, and

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invasions finally pushed the Christian world over the edge. The Islamic world was in a weakened state because of the struggle between the Muslim Seljuk Turks and the Muslim Arabs, and they didn't at first take the Christian threat seriously. After all, the Byzantine Christians had fallen easily before Muslim armies and the Latin Christians in the West were unwashed illiterate barbarians from what the cultivated Muslims regarded as the western jungles of Europe, the frozen fringe of the world.

Surprise! After 300 years, the western Christians had begun the push back against the Muslim invasions of 700AD. Sicily, Malta, southern Italy and half of Spain were back in Christian hands much to the shock the Islamic world. They have never quite gotten over that shock. The steady growth of Dar al Islam met its first setback. A land once ruled by Islam is thought of as Dar al Islam, the House of Islam, to which others have no right in the eyes of Allah. The loss of Spain in particular is still a thorn in the Muslim scheme of things. The expulsion of Islam from Spain featured prominently in the thinking of Osama bin Laden. Things like the train bombings in Madrid in March, 2004 that killed 200 people are retaliation for the expulsion of Muslims 500 years earlier! Bin Laden was determined to take Spain back for Islam and he is not alone in that project.

There is another myth that when the Crusaders finally took Jerusalem back in 1099 that all the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants were killed by the Crusaders. Those Muslims who were holed up in the fortress of the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque were indeed killed, but those in the citadel of David on the opposite side of town were given a safe conduct, and there is no contemporary evidence that any Jews were killed. In fact there are contemporary documents found among Jewish papers in Egypt (from the Cairo Geniza) indicating that Jews survived the siege of Jerusalem.



It is often mentioned that Saladin spared the Christians of Jerusalem when he reconquered the city in 1187. This is not as magnanimous as it might seem. At first Saladin had no plans to do so. Crusaders threatened to kill 5,000 Muslim hostages, and to destroy the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Saladin accepted the terms,

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on the condition that a ransom was paid for every Christian of the city, man, woman and child but Saladin, Patriarch Heraclius, the bishop of Jerusalem paid the ransoms for about 18,000 of the poorer citizens, but another 15,000, who could not afford ransom were enslaved. So much for the chivalrous Saladin, despite recent movies.

Another group of Muslim invaders about 60 years later in 1244, the Khwarezmian Tartars, sacked Jerusalem, decimated the city's Christian population and drove out the Jews. Finally in the 1500's the Ottoman Turks took Jerusalem and a status quo endured until the 20th century in Jerusalem, the City of Peace.

To be continued...

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Conflict, Battles and Slaughter

The Arab era of the Crusades ended with the fading of the Fatimid Caliphate and a new force, already mentioned, the Turks became the driving force in Islam. Until the 20th century, the terms Turk and Muslim were pretty much interchangeable.

After the Crusades, Christianity had its own divisions. The eastern Christian Roman Empire which we usually call the Byzantine Empire shrank away under the onslaughts of the Turkish Muslim invaders until it was just a few sections of Greece, some Greek islands and the enclave immediately surrounding Constantinople and its massive walls. In 1453 Constantinople finally became part of *Dar al Islam*.

The Turkish Muslims had succeeded where the Arab Muslims had failed. The Turkish Muslim invaders swept through the Balkans into Austria and Dar al Islam embraced what today are Greece, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Albania, Macedonia and the rest of the former Yugoslavia, Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes and many of the other Mediterranean islands were all part of the Islamic Empire. Vienna stood alone as the gateway to the final Muslim conquest of Europe.



In 1529, Sultan [Suleiman the Magnificent](#) laid siege to Vienna, the weather turned, the Austrians and their few allies held fast and the Turks had to retreat. One hundred fifty years of intermittent war ensued and the Turkish Sultan amassed a great fleet and army for the invasion of Italy and the final conquest of Rome, weakened by the Reformation. Luther had said that life under the Muslims would be easier for Protestants than life under the Pope.

The fleet was gathered just across the narrow Adriatic in the Gulf of Corinth, at Lepanto. On [October 7, 1571](#) a meager force of Christians had gathered, led by Don Juan of Austria. They sailed to what seemed certain doom, the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe placed prominently on Don Juan's flagship. The wind turned, the Muslim fleet defeated, and the sea power of Dar al Islam was broken and to this day the Islamic world is not a naval power.

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Vienna was once again put under siege by the Muslim invaders in 1683... on September 11, 1683. September 11th.... where have I heard that date? The Islamic Empire in Europe reached its high water mark. There were two battles happening simultaneously. Armies of Turks were trying to tunnel under the walls, but it is said that the bakers of Vienna, the first ones up in the morning heard the sound of scraping under their shops and realized that they were being tunneled under! The tunnelers were defeated, Meanwhile above ground, King [Jan Sobieski](#) and the Polish army came to the relief of the Christians, and on September 12, routed the Turkish armies, which began the steady retreat of Dar al Islam in the Christian west, at least until our own times.



Dar al Islam has never been as extensive as it was on Sep. 11, 1683. Every time you eat a croissant, French for crescent, you may be eating a commemoration of the great battle of Vienna, one of the many times Poland saved Christianity, because as the old story goes the bakers made crescent rolls to give thanks for the defeat of the Turks whose battle flag bore the crescent moon of Islam. The steady retreat of the (Muslim Turkish) Ottoman Empire continued until it vanished like a soap bubble in 1922, having already lost most of its European possessions.

The myth says that the Crusades were a failure. All that killing for nothing, and there certainly was killing, and mismanagement and excesses on the part of the Christians. What did it accomplish?

It accomplished plenty. In the year 1000 it was a foregone conclusion on the part of Christian and Muslim alike that Christianity was over. The heartlands of Christianity, Egypt, Syria, and North Africa were all lost to Christendom. Muslims had invaded the heart of Christendom and they wouldn't and they won't stop-- ever. The Crusades stopped the steady drumbeat of Muslim invasion and took back at least some of the lands stolen by the armies of Islam. The Muslim invader is nothing if not persistent. The initiative was lost by the Arab founders of Islam, but was picked up the Turks who lost it in turn.

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Now the Ayatollahs of Iran and the Wahabi sheiks of our Saudi Arabian allies seem ready to try again. We like to think that the world has changed. In the unending war between the House of Islam and the rest of the world nothing has changed and we are wishful; fools if we believe things are better now.

We slaughtered them. They slaughtered us. Nothing much here to be proud of for Christians, but it is sheer stupidity to believe that Islam was the victim and Christendom the aggressor. Clearly Christians in their attempts to defend themselves did not always live up to the tenets of their faith. In this there is nothing to be proud of.

The chilling thing is that while one side failed on occasion to live up to expectations, one side was true to its founder in the midst of conquest and slaughter.

Next week: more slaughter.

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Lands and Souls -- Won and Lost

It is also part of the myth that the Islamic world is at its high point. The high point of Islam was on September 11th 1683, the day before the Turks were routed by the Poles at the [Battle of Vienna](#). People are unaware that Russia was subjugated to the “[Golden Horde](#)” also called the Mongol-Tatar Empire, a collection of Mongol and Turkic invaders, some Buddhist, some animists, some Muslim, (An interesting side bar: The word “horde” means a kind of large mob in English. It is derived from the Persian/Iranian word “Urdu” which means “camp.” Urdu now refers to the language spoken by 60 million Pakistani and Indian Muslims. It is a variety of Hindi, the national language of India) The Golden Horde became completely Islamicized by 1315 AD. They ruled Russia for almost 300 years. Allied with the Ottoman Turks, they burned Moscow in 1571. The invaders were finally defeated by the Russians in the next year at Molodi, but south of what today is Russia remained under Muslim control for centuries to come.

During the same era, almost all of India/Pakistan was ruled by Muslims. The Sultanate of Delhi was established in 1206 and by 1266 controlled all but the southern tip of the Indian sub-continent. The Sultans of Delhi were Turkic Muslims who were eventually replaced Islamic Mongols called the Timurids who established the Mughal (Mongol) Empire in 1527 not unlike nor unrelated to, the golden Urdu, or horde in Russia. They ruled India for the next 250 years until the British ended Muslim domination of India/Pakistan in 1764. It is impossible to estimate the death toll of Hindus killed in the Muslim takeover of India, but remembering that the Hindus were, by most measures, idolaters and not necessarily entitled to *Dhimmi* status in Muslim, the toll is certainly in the tens of millions, some estimates go as high as 80 million.

The list of countries that are no longer part of the Islamic world include Portugal, Spain, southern France, Sicily, Malta, southern Italy, India, parts of Russia and the Ukraine, Greece, southern Sudan and all the Balkan Christian countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Greece. Kosovo and Albania are still Muslim majority countries, but Albania is considered one the 14 most non-religious countries in the world.)

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Turkey which was the center of the Islamic world for 500 years is now a secular republic in which about a third of those who consider themselves Muslim do not actively fulfill their religious obligations. Lebanon and the Holy Land are, of course, contested on a daily basis. *Dar al Islam*, the World of Islam, had gotten a toe hold in the Philippines when Europeans showed up and now the Philippines is one of the most Christian of countries. The Muslim insurgents in the south are trying very hard to change that and to restore the Philippines to the *Dar al Islam*.

This is a very disturbing list to some Muslims, and many of the devout think that job one is the restoration of the full complement of *Dar al Islam* preceding the victory of Sharia, the divine Koranic government over the whole world. Still, there is no disputing that *Dar al Islam* is a smaller place in the 21st century than it was in the 17th century.

Remember that at a number of points in world history, Islam was probably the majority religion of the world. The near East and India and China were where the bulk of the world's population lived. Europe in the year 1000 was just a backwater where a few unwashed, stinking, illiterate infidels (my ancestors) lived in the fog and frozen forests. In 700 AD and again in 1000AD it was assumed in Europe that the future was Muslim, and then the Crusades halted the advance of Islam into Europe.

Though they are a defining moment in Western history, the Crusades were barely noticed in the Islamic world at the time. They were merely an irritation to the great Saladin. Undeterred, Islam continued its glorious march through history. As Christendom collapsed during the reformation, Martin Luther said "A smart Turk makes a better ruler than a dumb Christian."



Protestantism at the time found allies in the Turkish Muslims who shared their hatred of Catholicism and the Holy Roman Empire. There is a curious crescent shaped medallion that was minted in the Protestant Netherlands around 1570 when Holland was at war with Spain. It is a [Geuzen or beggar's medal](#) that had as its motto "Better the Turk than the pope." So, once again Christianity was over in 1570, and then the battles of Lepanto and Vienna

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stopped the Turkish march into Europe once again. The [Battle of Lepanto](#) had a significance that not everyone considers. By damaging Muslim sea power, it opened the way for Christian navies, which intentionally or unintentionally, brought Christ to sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas and the Philippines. There are at present around 210 countries in the world. About 150 are Christian majority and about 50 majority Muslim. (These numbers are only approximate. No one can agree on what countries actually exist. The UN counts 207 sovereign states.)

It is another myth that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. At the current writing there are 2.2 billion Christians in the world, about 1 in 3 people on the globe. Islam with about 1.6 billion adherents, about 1 in 4 people, is the second largest religion in the world. No religion is the third largest religion in the world as claimed by 1,100 million people, and Hinduism is the 4th largest religion in the world with about 950 million adherents.

The fastest growing religion in the world by percentage of its own membership is probably Bahai, Buddhism, Wicca or Zoroastrianism. Islam is growing faster than Christianity by percentage of its own membership. This is due to a high birth rate which is expected to drop over the next 20 years. In terms of absolute numbers of new adherents, Christianity is probably the fastest growing religion. Christian Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa and China are growing at a phenomenal rate, with at least 50 million Christians in China. China is, in fact, one of the largest Christian countries in the world. Devoutly Christian countries like the Philippines and Mexico continue to have a high birth rate as does Southern Africa. Most sociologists don't see anything eclipsing Christianity in the foreseeable future.

It is to be remembered that Islam is also losing adherents in the countries to which Muslims have migrated. The London Times estimates 15% of Muslims living in Western Europe have left Islam with 200,000 former Muslims in the UK alone. The secularism of Europe is a growing danger to the faith of Islamic emigrants. In 1998, mosque attendance in the Netherlands was rated at 47 percent. In 2008 it is down to 35 percent. I remember seeing a group of beer drinking Turkish Muslims in my ancestral town in Germany who were watching a Catholic religious procession. I asked the town's pastor

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if Muslims drank beer in Germany, and he simply smiled and said “Oh, Allah is very far away.” The much touted conversions to Islam are not all they seem to be either. Among American converts to Islam, 75% leave Islam in first two years.

There has never been a time in history when so many Muslims have converted to Christianity. It is estimated that about 15,000 Muslims convert to Christianity annually in France. In Russia, the number of ethnic Muslims in Russia who have become Christians is estimated at 2 million, while the number of the Orthodox who have been converted to Islam is only 2,500 according Inter-religious Council of Russia. In Asia, the Mufti of the Malaysian State of Perak claims that 250,000 Muslim apostates have asked for permission to convert to Christianity (In Malaysia, non Malay ethnics may legally convert, though it is seldom allowed.) This is perhaps a matter of alarmism on the part of Muslim clerics, but it does indicate that conversion to Christianity is a problem.



Muslim authorities in Egypt are in a similar dither about Fr. Zacharias Botros an Egyptian Coptic priest and Koranic scholar. Islamic authorities count his converts to Islam in the millions. Fr. Botros just laughs at this and says that if a few hundred have converted to Christianity because of his radio and television ministry that would be a lot. Nonetheless, he is considered to be “Islam's public enemy No. 1” by quite a few in the Islamic world. Al-Qaeda has put a \$60 million bounty on his head. That’s how worried they are about the conversion problem. One hears of similar things going on in Kurdistan, in Iran and a number of other places in the Islamic world. This is particularly amazing when one remembers that to leave Islam is usually *Shirq*, an unforgivable sin. Muhammad declared the death sentence for apostasy. A family is honor bound to kill any of its members who convert to Christianity or any other religion for that matter. That does put a bit of pressure on prospective converts. It is also necessary to kill anyone who attempts to convert a Muslim to any other religion.

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I've spoken to a number of Muslim converts to Christianity. The thing that they found most amazing about Christianity is the idea that God loves Muslims. Remember that Islam has no belief in free will, as least as understood in the non-Calvinist west, and like Calvinists do not believe that God's love is universal. Mercy (*rahmah*) and pity are universal, but affection (*wudda*) and love (*hub*) are limited to those of the faith. "Say, O My Prophet to the people, if you love God, follow me, God will love you (*hub*) and forgive you your sins, for God is oft-forgiving, most merciful." (Koran 3:31)

In his farewell sermon Muhammad said, "Whomever Allah guides none can lead astray, and whomever He leads astray has no one to guide him." To put it simply, if Allah loved you, you would be a Muslim. If you are not a Muslim, Allah must not love you, though he may pity you and show you mercy. It is thus amazing to Muslims that the God of Christians loves them every bit as much as He loves the Christians. It will be interesting to see the effect of an increasing awareness of Islamic texts by Christians and of Christian texts by Muslims. The world of *Dar al Islam* may not grow as quickly as some people think.

(Next week: The grand finale. Finally)

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Choices... “As for me and my house...”

So we come to the end of another excessively long letter, a complicated answer to a simple question, “Where did Islam come from?” You’ll have to be the judge of that. The resemblances between Islam and Christianity appear to be many at first, but after any real inquiry, it is the remarkable differences that emerge. The two most glaring differences that I notice are first that Christians believe that the phrase “God is Father” as expressed in the Lord’s prayer, the Our Father is the summit of Christian faith. For Muslims it is the greatest heresy. And second, Christians regard violence as always undesirable, though it may be necessary for self defense.

It is interesting to note that medieval knights in shining armor were always a little bit outside of Christian law as the medieval mind understood it, even when they fought in self defense. Though their sin was mitigated by circumstance, they still confessed military activity as sin and were expected to do penance for it. To go on Crusade, or “to take the Cross” as they put it, was not to go to war. It was to make a solemn vow to pray at the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem, and when that was done a knight was expected to go home. He might have to fight along the way, but he did not go, at least theoretically, to gain territory or wealth.

In fact many noblemen of Europe were bankrupted by the expense of going on pilgrimage, a journey from which only one in two returned. Amazingly, if a man made a vow to go to Jerusalem, he had to have his wife’s permission. If she refused her permission, his vow was invalid and he was released from his obligation.

If anything has indicated the difference between Islam and Christianity, it is this. For a Muslim, it would be inconceivable for a woman to forbid a man to fulfill his sacred duty to wage jihad. Islam is jihad. Jihad means struggle. There is the greater and the lesser jihad. The first is internal moral struggle and the second is war. Clearly, and unmistakably from the times of Muhammad until now, the concept of jihad includes war.

By his own lights, a Christian who fights is doing something undesirable, even when the fight is necessary for the defense of the innocent and weak, or for self defense. It is

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less than the best, though it is sometimes the best who must fight. There is no Christian soldier who, taking his faith seriously, would rather make war than enjoy the blessings of peace. In Islam war is a sacred duty, a privilege and even a joy. Ayatollah Khomeini once said "The purest joy in Islam is to kill and be killed for Allah." You might think this is a minority opinion, but history seems to indicate otherwise. By pointing this out I am not trying to say, "How awful!" I am just trying to say "How different."

When a madman claiming to be Christian kills, saying it is God's will, somewhere inside, every Christian and probably the madman himself knows that such a thing is absolutely contrary to the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth. When a Muslim martyr straps on a bomb, he does so knowing that this is the day decreed by Allah for his death. There are different interpretations of such actions in the different Islamic schools, but the bomber himself believes that he is engaging in a supremely moral act. He has been encouraged by relatives, friends and teachers and, if successful is lionized in the Islamic world for his heroism. This is not a small thing.

When two planes flew into the twin towers on September 11, 2001, much of the Islamic world broke out in celebration. Western journalists filming the celebrations were threatened with death for reporting what the local authorities didn't want the West to understand: that the two worlds are different. Those who celebrated were applauding an act of moral courage, according to their belief system. They believed they were acting morally, as were the hijackers.

We are different in our approach to women, to war, human destiny, to the nature of divinity and to the deity's relation to humanity. We are different in our approach to sacred scripture. The Koran contains the unchangeable words of Allah given to Muhammad, a revelation which took place over a few decades. Nothing important took place before that revelation, and very little of importance, except its application in the world, has happened since.

The Bible is a conversation between the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God Christians hold to be the Father of Jesus of Nazareth and, for that matter, of all humanity. The conversation covers about two thousand years. Parts of our sacred text

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point out the difficult and sinful human beings whom God invites to his embrace. It is as much about humanity as it is about divinity and it shows human beings at their best and their worst, God loving them in all circumstances even when it seems like pretty tough love.

Both religions are about submission to the maker of all things, but submission in the two religions is very different. The very word Islam means “submission or surrender.” It is submission to the will of the absolutely sovereign Other. The submission, the surrender, of Christianity is found in the Our Father, “Thy will be done, Thy Kingdom come.” It is surrender to a Father who loves us and whom we trust absolutely. The Christian attitude to the will of God is not a shoulder-shrugging, regretful “It’s God’s will.” Christian surrender is a joyful embrace of a plan better than our own, the perfect plan of a doting Father, a Father who is wiser than we are. It takes a Christian a long time to get there, but that joyful, trusting surrender is the goal of the Christian life.

So, we are different. The difference is summed up in two words: Jesus and Muhammad. I think every Christian should read the Koran and every Muslim should read the New Testament. Ultimately one is true and the other is false. The Muhammad to whom the Koran was revealed and the Jesus of the New Testament are diametrically opposed to each other. You cannot obey them both. You can obey one, the other or neither, but you cannot be the follower of both.

There is a song that says “Turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” I invite you to turn your eyes upon Jesus and Muhammad both. I know whom I have chosen and why I have chosen Him.

The Rev. Know it all