

Fort Bend Christian Academy- Honors Apologetics

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Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Analysis Addressing Peace

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2. A Note the The Reader

My goal in writing this thesis is to provide you, the reader, with an in-depth analysis of both Christianity and Islam in order to answer the question of whether or not these two religious powerhouses promote peace. At face value, the onus that I have taken on seems to have a simple answer given the way in which each of these two faiths are portrayed in the modern-day media. However, upon researching and constructing a consensus on the faith traditions respectively, it becomes evident that both contain a number of nuances that, if read out of the context or mindset of the time period in which they were written, can lead one to draw an incorrect conclusion on their theological as well as ethical principles. Some would argue that religion, in its most basic form, is an institution that promotes cultural practices such as violence, conquest, and forced conversions. I do recognize that in some instances within the history of both Christianity and Islam, even today, there is evidence of the aforementioned violence. However, I hope that in writing this I establish a distinction between the cultural practices of a society and the reality of the ethics present in both faith traditions within this thesis. The following sections cover a wide variety of topics from the texts of both religions and their ethical underpinnings, the treatment of individuals within and outside of the two religious communities, and even the way in which the creation of art can reflect peace in a given society. I advise that you read the thesis in its entirety to grasp the nature of the argument being made, and hopefully you, as the reader, gain a new piece of knowledge that aids in understanding either religion, and to a greater extent, how to correctly address combing through seemingly contradictory language and practices in any scenario.

3. Introduction

Both Christianity and Islam are religions that have experienced criticism over the years addressing their respective views on violence.. While the martial history of these two religions can not be denied, as that would be scholarly impractical, the generalisations often associated with both groups lead to incorrect and ill-sourced conclusions about their ethical codes. The overarching goal of this thesis is to dispel any incorrect interpretations associated with these two religions and seperate the connection of cultural influence and religious dogma as these two can often be made synonymous.

Firstly, the history of Arab culture prior to Islam's introduction in the seventh century will be analysed in order to gain knowledge of the mindset Muhammad actively fought against, followed by the life of Muhammad, and finally the martial history of Islam in the literal sense. Immediately following this section will be the introduction of the holy text of the Qur'an in Islam as well as supplementary texts leading up to a brief note stressing the importance of reading these texts in their context to understand their application. Appropriately, the Christian church history will be analyzed stating the aforementioned point of the importance historical context holds in correctly applying the text.

In the proof of the thesis, the concept of *jihad* is addressed in its entirety alongside a section investigating how Muhammad instructs his followers on dealing with those who are not Muslim. The texts themselves will be examined as a means of gaining the full depth of how a Muslim is called to think and act in situations where violence is an option. Art is utilized in this thesis as well to showcase how art reflects a society's growth and expansion, and finally the treatment of women according to Muhammad along with a brief overview of Islam's actual

views on violence will be studied to effectively prove Islam is a religion with a goal of peace. Christianity will follow essentially the same outline to bring about a true comparison of the two faiths.

In writing this thesis the aim is to prove that both of these religions have a peaceful agenda however there seem to be differences in how said peace is obtained as will be further explained throughout this thesis. In junction with the aforementioned burden of proof taken on in writing this thesis, there is a goal of establishing a dialogue urging readers to learn about separating the cultural practices of a society with a specific dogma present in a religion.

4. A Brief History of Islam

4.1. Pre-Islamic Arabia

In both the Hadith and the Qur'an, the time period before the introduction of Islam into the Arabian peninsula is referred to as *jahiliyyah*¹. It is marked by being a period of ignorance, both socially and spiritually, as well as an age that encouraged tribalism. In response to the debauchery, paganism, and tribalistic mentalities that ruling classes in the society endorsed, Muhammad revealed the revelations received from *Jibril*² to Meccans and eventually other societies throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe. Islamic scholars utilize the shift in culture before and after the introduction of Islam as grounds for arguing the validity of Muhammad being a prophet of Allah. It could be argued that Islam civilized the "uncivilized" culture present in Arabia.

¹ Jahiliyyah (Arabic: جَاهِلِيَّة *gāhiliyyah/jāhilīyah* "ignorance") is the Islamic concept that argues Arabia was failing as a society and culture prior to the introduction of Islam. Arabia is described as a misguided and tribalistic society in this period.

² Jibril (Arabic: جِبْرِيل *jibrīl*) is an Arabic name of the angel Gabriel who is believed to have been sent from Allah to impart the message and teachings of Islam to Muhammad.

One feature of Arab culture before the establishment of Islam was the absence of political structure or a centralized rule of law. Essentially no part of the Arabian peninsula, with the exception of Yemen, had an organized governmental system, but instead functioned as societies run by tribal leaders. Tribalism (*asabiyya*) was the lifestyle in which pre-Islamic Arabs functioned because it fostered familial bonds as well as an independent yet understood system of governance between tribes. A society run on the premises of *jahiliyyah* is a society run on lawless behavior and vigilante justice which effectively eliminates the need for ethics.

“In practice, the free Arabs were bound by no written code of law, and no state existed to enforce its statutes with the backing of a police force. The only protection for a man's life was the certainty established by custom, that it would be dearly bought. Blood for blood and a life for a life. The vendetta, *tha'r* in Arabic, is one of the pillars of Bedouin society.”³

Pre-Islamic Arabs were accustomed to a political and social system that demanded a lifestyle predicated on ethics that were customary, and the necessity to uphold the status quo in these societies was imperative for the survival of tradition and bloodlines. The Qur'an dissented from the traditional mindsets of *jahiliyyah* that many of the people within the Arab culture at the time utilised as a basis of ethics. This, in part, is the reason why Muhammad and his teachings were not welcomed in the beginnings of Islam.

The social conditions of Arab culture were barbaric in practice, and Islam offered an enlightened position on the way in which people should interact with one another on a day-to-day basis. The cultural fabric of Arabia, being a male dominated society, constricted the influence women had in the social and political systems of the day. Islamic theology argues that

³ Arabia before Islam. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://www.al-islam.org/restatement-history-islam-and-muslims-sayyid-ali-ashgar-razwy/arabia-islam>

Allah had the goal of eliminating the imbalances of power between men and women in Arab culture through Muhammad as well as the implementation of Qur'anic tenets. Islam also reformed the institution of marriage to protect the rights and interests of women in Arabia. Muhammad also sought to address the debauchery and blatant indecency in Arab culture. He additionally preached against drunkenness, gambling, and other factors of *jahiliyyah* that people in these societies viewed as ethical.

Religion in pre-Islamic Arabia consisted of conflicting faiths battling over prominence in the region. Jews, Christians, Atheists, and polytheists were the main religious sects that dominated the culture throughout the peninsula, but were specifically prominent in major cities such as Mecca and Medina where religious warfare and tribal infighting were a way of life. Despite the blend of religions in the region, the dominant belief system was Arab polytheism which was generally practiced by the nomadic Bedouin populations. The Qur'an sought to eliminate the polytheistic practices in Arabia and replace them with the monotheistic religion of Islam.

The introduction of Islam into Arabia essentially revitalized the culture of an entire people group that would develop into being a model for education, economic prosperity, social mobility, and cultural growth as a result. The time period that was *jahiliyyah* was not hospitable nor did it contribute to the continuation of a productive society. Arabia was stagnant and riddled with archaic perceptions of the world which Islam actively fought against in its formative years. Arguably, without Islam, much of the Arab world would not have progressed at the rate at which it did.

4.2. The Life of Muhammad

Muhammad ibn Abdullah is historically accredited to being the founder of the Islamic faith. However, theologically he is referred to as the last Islamic prophet of Allah following Moses, *Nuh*, *Isa*, *Adem*, and *Ibrahim*⁴. His revelations were a catalyst for the Islamic movement throughout the Arabian peninsula that would eventually spread throughout the world, and his transcription of the revelations received from Allah detailed in the Qur'an present modern day Muslims with a basis for Islamic religious principles.

Muhammad was born in 570 CE in the Arabian city of Mecca to a prominent merchant family belonging to the Banu Hashim clan. Both his father, *Abdullah ibn Abdul-Muttalib*, and mother, *Amina bint Wahb*, died before the prophet-to-be turned eight, effectively leaving him orphaned at an early age. Throughout his formative years, he was passed throughout the family tree to guardians, which aligned with the customs of pre-Islamic Arabia, until he was old enough to establish a caravan that would eventually make him a well-known merchant. His gained prominence as a merchant throughout the Arabian peninsula as well as southeastern Asia coupled with newfound popularity made him an attractive suitor. *Khadija bint Khuwaylid*, a 40 year old widow from a wealthy merchant family, who would become Muhammad's first wife as well as follower, offered him her hand in marriage to which he accepted. She is often referred to as "The Mother of Believers" among Muslims because of her early influence during the conquests of the Arabian peninsula as well as the precedent she set for the role of Muslim women after the introduction of Islam.

⁴ The Arabic equivalents to Noah, Isaac, Adam, and Abraham who are all viewed as prophets prior to Muhammad in Islam.

As detailed in the Islamic tradition, the first revelation from Allah to Muhammad occurred in the year 610 CE. The angel *Jibril* appeared to him in a cave named *Hira* on *Mount Jabal al-Nour* and commanded him to recite verses that would eventually be included in the Qur'an. The majority of the Muslim community believes that the first *ayat* or verse revealed to The Prophet is found in the 96th *surah* in the Qur'an, effectively marking the beginning of the revelations to The Prophet Muhammad. Initially, Muhammad was deeply troubled by the recurring revelatory meetings he had with *Jibril*. However, the advice of Khadija and his Christian cousin, *Waraqah ibn Nawfal*, encouraged him to continue praying in the cave in order to receive scripture from Allah. Eventually, a condensed collection of the revelations became what is now known as the Qur'an today after 23 years of revelations from *Jibril*.

The beginnings of Islam started with Muhammad, Khadija, and their four children who embraced the newly minted philosophies and teachings of Islam. Muhammad's early teachings included the recitation of revelations he received from Allah as well as a call to Meccans to eliminate idols and engage in a monotheistic faith tradition. The introduction of Islam into Mecca, which was a lucrative pilgrimage sight for polytheists, became a threat to the ruling class who profited off of those who entered Mecca for religious purposes. Islam gained traction in Mecca and grew rapidly, however, many of the patricians in the city opposed the new religion Muhammad preached that promoted principles such as monotheism and abstinence.

In 619 CE, both Khadija and Muhammad's uncle, *Abu Talib*, died which left the Banu Hashim tribe with *Abu Lahab* as the de facto leader. The Banu Hashim were given the ultimatum from the Meccan oligarchy to either remove the tribal protections from Muhammad and his followers or have an embargo placed on them that would hinder their ability to reap the rewards

of trade. To assert his power and ensure the survival of the Banu Hashim he withdrew the tribal protections granted to Muhammad and those who followed his teachings as per their birthright. This was the first instance in which there was a blatant opposition to Muhammad and those who followed him.

As Islam spread in Mecca, the ruling tribes began to outwardly oppose the teachings and tenets of Islam. Muhammad was invited by the ruling families of Medina (formerly known as *Yathrib*) as an objective observer and arbitrator to the religious strife involving Arabs and Jews in the area. Because of the work Muhammad did to resolve the cyclical warfare in the area he and his followers were in turn granted protection by the tribes in Medina. After returning to Mecca, he became aware of the danger early Muslims faced because of their obvious dissension from the polytheistic grasp the Quraysh tribe, who profited from the many pilgrims to the *Kaaba*⁵, had on the city of Mecca. In response, he urged his followers to emigrate from Mecca to Medina in order to escape the increasing threat to their survival.

In 622 CE the *Hijra*, the migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina, came to fruition. He migrated in June 622 CE after he heard of the assassination plot against him. Upon his return to Medina, he drafted the *Dastūr al-Madīnah*. This document established an alliance between the eight tribes of Medina and the new Muslim emigrants from Mecca after the *hijra*. The constitution instituted rights and responsibilities to Christians, Muslims, Jews, and pagans which ultimately became the first *ummah* or pilgrimage in Arabia.

⁵ “The Kaaba, meaning cube in Arabic, is a square building elegantly draped in a silk and cotton veil. Located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, it is the holiest shrine in Islam. It was rededicated to Islam by Muhammad after the conquest of Mecca by the early Muslims.” The Kaaba. (n.d.). Retrieved

From
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/west-and-central-asia/a/the-kaaba>

One of the most profound factors presented in Muhammad's document, which was widely accepted in Medina, was the replacement of the Pre-Islamic tribal mindset of *jahiliyyah* with a cultural mindset dependent upon the connection of those within the Muslim faith. The laws outlined in the constitution provided both the *Muhajirin*⁶ and the *Ansar*⁷ in Medina with a code of ethics to live by in the newly established *ummah*. This "treaty" of sorts established a rule of law in Medina that would bring about stability as well as a cultural shift. *Muhammad Ibn Ishaq* offered a condensed outline of the agreement between Muhammad and the non-Muslim tribes in Medina in one of the most important accounts of the life of The Prophet to Islamic Theology. This account contains numerous clauses such as:

"No Believer shall oppose the client of another Believer. Whosoever is rebellious, or seeks to spread injustice, enmity or sedition among the Believers, the hand of every man shall be against him, even if he be a son of one of them. A Believer shall not kill a Believer in retaliation of an unbeliever, nor shall he help an unbeliever against a Believer"⁸

This particular clause within the treaty addresses the requirement of Muslims to remain peaceful and loyal to one another even in times of strife or hardship. This requirement sets the precedent for the formation of a formidable Islamic state in Medina. Unity between Muslims in Medina was imperative for the institution of the *Ummah* and survival of the religion in a region that was generally hostile to its adherents. The unifying nature of the treaty juxtaposed the pre-Islamic cultural practice of tribalism, and redefined the way in which Arabs view one another. No longer were "blood ties" a necessity for loyalty, but the belief in Allah was the only requirement for faithfulness to one another. Muhammad also addressed the relationship Muslim

⁶ The *muhajirin* translates to "the emigrants" or first converts to Islam.

⁷ The *ansar* refers to all non-believers.

⁸ Lecker, M. (2004). *The "constitution of Medina": Muhammad's first legal document*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

and Jews should have in the new *ummah* as a way to both quell violence in Medina as well as gain allies for times of crisis. This premise is outlined in a clause of the treaty that states:

“The Jews shall be responsible for their expenses and the Believers for theirs. Each, if attacked, shall come to the assistance of the other. “The valley of Yathrib (Medina) shall be sacred and inviolable for all that join this Treaty. Strangers, under protection, shall be treated on the same ground as their protectors; but no stranger shall be taken under protection except with consent of his tribe....No woman shall be taken under protection without the consent of her family.”⁹

The implementation of this document after the *hijra* created a unified multi-religious Islamic state in Medina that was declared as a *haram* by Muhammad that blood of believers or others included in the treaty was to be spilled. This was, in essence, the first peaceful conquest of Muhammad and his adherents in Arabia, and became a model for future conquests to further the Islamic cause. These conquests would reach throughout the Arabian peninsula, Asia, and Europe while following the pluralistic philosophy outlined in the original *Dastur al-Madinah*.

4.3. Conquest and Establishment of Islam in Arabia

Following the acceptance and implementation of the *Dastur al-Madinah* Muhammad and his newly minted religion began to gain traction. This traction, however, did not occur overnight nor did it occur without a militaristic conquest of cities throughout the Arabian peninsula. The *hijra* and the subsequent results of it marked the beginning of the rapid expansion Islam would have throughout the region from the first military conquest in 623 CE to Muhammad’s death in 632 CE.

In the year 623 CE, Muhammad and his followers engaged in a total of seven recorded raids and expeditions which were all directed to Meccan and Qurayshi caravanners travelling between Mecca, Syria, Saudi-Arabia, Yemen, and other prominent trading posts throughout the

⁹ Ibid.

peninsula . These expeditions were a response to the blatant opposition from the Meccan nobility as well as members of tribes throughout the city so that early Muslims were able to assert dominance in the broken and hostile society that surrounded them. The battles following the *hijra* were also a response to the unjust persecution that the Meccans as well as other people groups instituted against early Muslims as well as the embargoes placed on supporters of Muhammad. All of the raids documented in the year 623 CE were peaceful and resulted in no bloodshed and were successful without engaging in armed combat. In the first expedition, *Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib*, along with 40 men, was ordered by Muhammad to intercept a Qurayshi caravan travelling from Mecca. Hamza expected conflict, however there was none due to a Qurayshi ally being a part of the caravan by the name of *Majdi ibn 'Amr al-Juhani*. The subsequent raids and expeditions throughout the year 623 CE had similar outcomes without combat and some resulted in converts to Islam without violence and virtually no push back.

In *Ramadan* 624 CE, the peaceful raids and expeditions that The Prophet and his followers engaged in came to an end as early Muslims were urged to participate in offensive military expeditions against the Qurayshi people. Islamic theological texts posit that Muhammad and his followers were given a mandate from Allah to engage in armed conflict against the Quraysh tribe. The Battle of Badr marked the beginning of the archetypal military conquests often attributed to Muhammad and Islam's rise to prominence in the Arabian peninsula because of the shift from peaceful expeditions to retaliatory military conquest, and it is also one of the few battles explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an as it is expressed as being decisive and influential to the continuation of Islam. The battle is often expressed in Islamic oral and written tradition as being both a battle where divine intervention was evident as well as being *Yaum al-Furqan* or

“The Day of Distinguishing”. Islamic theology also points towards this battle being the introduction of the Islamic principle known as *Jihad* or “fighting in the way of Allah”. Following the will of Allah, Muhammad and his adherents intercepted a Meccan caravan who’s leader had been a conspirator in plundering Muslims homes before *al-Hijra*. Prior to the battle, Muhammad had intended to simply raid the Meccan caravan peacefully without any bloodshed. However, Islamic texts point towards Allah willing Muhammad to go into battle against the Meccan caravaners in order to initiate *al-Furqan*. The battle is argued to be a real-world depiction of Allah separating *Muhajireen* from combatant and oppressive *Ansar* forces, and many modern-day Muslims recognize its importance as being a defining moment for the survival of Islam in the Arabian peninsula. The Muslims, who were led by Muhammad and joined by members of the Hashemite tribe, were victorious after the battle had concluded despite being outnumbered. 70 Meccan pagans lost their lives in battle, and 70 were taken as prisoners. Ultimately, the Battle of Badr laid the foundation for what would become the Islamic State and presented Muhammad and the followers of Allah as a formidable force to those who attempted to oppress them in the Arabian peninsula.

“No doubt, there was a sign for you in two groups that encountered among themselves. One gang fighting in the way of Allah and the other disbelievers that they understood them double of themselves in their eyesight;and Allah strengthens with His help whom He pleases. No doubt, in it there is teaching after seeing for the men of understanding.”¹⁰

Throughout the Qur’an, Allah makes it evident that those who follow Him will be blessed abundantly and will not be forsaken. However, those that purposefully disobey and contradict his teachings will be forsaken. The Battle of Badr, being the first Muslim show of force in the

¹⁰ The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Imran, 13

region, edified this point in the literal sense. Thus marking the beginning of a series of Muslim expeditions and conquests that would end in bloodshed for those who violently opposed the monotheistic teachings of Islam.

The second major military expedition in 624 CE led by Muhammad was the Battle of Uhud which was preceded by the aforementioned Battle of Badr which concluded with the Muslim forces being victors over a much larger and better equipped Meccan force. Contrary to the previous battle, many Muslim lives were lost and it was considered a major setback for Muhammad and Islamic expansion. This battle was sparked by the Meccan desire to avenge the losses incurred after Badr. Muhammad's forces had the upper hand in the beginning of the battle as they were successfully suppressing Meccan forces despite being significantly at a disadvantage, however the battle was lost due to a breach in Muhammad's orders. The archers questioned their positioning, which was ordered by Allah and passed on via Muhammad, and as a result allowed Meccan forces to initiate an ambush that decimated Muslim forces. Islamic theologians as well as Islamic texts point towards this loss being a result of disobedience. Thus affirming the concept of total devotion to the will of Allah.

“Allah did indeed fulfil His promise to you when ye with His permission Were about to annihilate your enemy,-until ye flinched and fell to disputing about the order, and disobeyed it after He brought you in sight (of the booty) which ye covet. Among you are some that hanker after this world and some that desire the Hereafter. Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you but He forgave you: For Allah is full of grace to those who believe.”¹¹

This second battle offered a juxtaposing lesson to the first as it presented Muslim forces with an alternative to victory. The results of this battle edified the point that Allah would not go

¹¹ The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Imran, 152

out His way to cause one to fail, but one's failure to obey his commands would end in their own self-destruction.

In 627 CE, the third major battle that furthered the scope of Muslim influence within the region is the Battle of the Trench, also known as the "Battle of the Confederates", was a 30-day long siege of Medina by Meccan forces who attempted to conspire with Jewish tribes to eradicate the impending Muslim threat in the region. Muhammad and his forces were greatly outnumbered 10:3, but the battle ended in a stalemate due to Muhammad's diplomatic ties with Jewish tribes in the region, poor weather conditions, and the military tactics utilised by Muslim forces which ultimately hindered Medianian casualties. The efforts of Meccan forces to defeat Muhammad and his followers failed, and as a result of the failed coup Muslim forces besieged the area where the Banu Qurayza tribe resided. This strategic defeat led to the loss of major trade routes for the Meccans and garnered more influence for Muhammad and his followers as both politically and militarily prestigious forces in the region. The destruction of Islam's most powerful opposition was instrumental in the rise of Islam's presence in the Arabian peninsula. The Islamic theologian and historian, Montgomery Watt, conjectures that the implications of this battle were much more significant than the material losses both the Muslims and Meccans experienced.

"For a society which was in spiritual turmoil, looking for new ways to organise their society and new ways to look at the world, the wind and the failure of the alliance to crush Muhammad when they had had their boot on his throat was a clear indication that God was on the Muslims side. This was especially when combined with similar events at Badr.[143] It was also a clear indication to the more materially-minded Bedouin tribes like the Ghatafan that Abu Sufyan could not provide any opportunities for loot in future, and they were better off siding with Muhammad."¹²

¹² Watt, W. M. (2012). *Muhammad at Medina*. United States?: Ulan Press.

Watts' quote only affirms the notion that the introduction of Islam was to eliminate the mindset of *jahiliyyah* that plagued the Arabian peninsula, and the Battle of the Trenches is one of the earliest instances of large scale conversion and compliance. Conversion to Islam transitioned from being simply a conversion of faith to a conversion of politics. Early Muslims' growing strength made it desirable to convert for preservation not only of one's individual self, but of Arab society as a whole.

The *Dastur al-Madinah* which instituted a code of ethics between Muslim adherents and members of neighboring tribes and religions was received without opposition by most. However, a small coalition of Jews were exiled from Medina due to their position in aiding Meccan forces in a small skirmish. For thousands of years, Jewish tribes in the region resided in the oasis known as *Khaybar* which was just north of Medina, but due to their failure to comply with the agreement outlined in the *Dastur al-Madinah* they were pushed out of the region by Muslim forces. In 629 CE the Battle of Khaybar, despite being smaller in scope than previous expeditions led by Muhammad in the region, resulted in a surrender of the Jewish tribes and a Muslim victory that eliminated the threat of a better equipped and wealthier opponents. Also, in the peace talks following the month and a half siege of the Jewish tribes and their eventual surrender, Muhammad was wed to his second wife, *Safiyyah bint Huyayy*, in order to preserve her status as a woman of good status and further protection of the Jews in the region. Khadija had passed away at this point, and Safiyyah assumed the role of the "Mother of Believers" despite being a Jew. Because of her marriage to Muhammad, a large concentration of the Jews still alive after the Battle of Khaybar converted to Islam. Thus, furthering the influence Muhammad had within the region.

The Battle of Mu'tah, which occurred in 629 CE, was an expedition ordered by Muhammad against the Byzantine and Bedouin tribes within the region. Islamic texts argue that the mandate to engage in armed conflict against the Byzantine tribes in the region was a response to the execution of a Muslim messenger named *Al-Harith ibn 'Umayr Al-'Azdi* as well as to put an end to unnecessary conflict these peoples encouraged. Three thousand Muslim warriors were assembled to conduct the fighting, and defend the apparent Muslim honor lost as a result of the messenger's execution. Muhammad instructed the three leaders he had appointed to carry out this mission to do the following:

"Go forth in the Name of Allah, in the cause of Allah and fight those who disbelieve in Allah. Proceed, but neither break pledges, act unfaithfully in regard to the booty, mutilate the killed, commit infanticide, nor kill the recluses in their monasteries."¹³

Similarly to every other expedition Muhammad engaged in, there were clear instructions to only raise up arms against combatants and conduct themselves in an honorable fashion while following the principle of *jihad*. This is a trend that is evident in each of the expeditions ordered by Muhammad. Also in accordance with many of the battles previously fought by the Muslims, Muhammad's followers were greatly outnumbered and when faced with the decision to retreat, request reinforcements, or fight despite being outnumbered 3,000 to 100,000, many fell into the latter category. Those that remained and fought were recognized as *al-shahid* by Muhammad and Allah in accordance with Islamic theology. Those that fled in the face of adversity were scorned and judged for allowing themselves to fall prey to fear and not resting their faith on Allah. Ultimately, this battle resulted in a Muslim defeat, but Muslim scholars pull from this battle an

¹³ Ahmad, Abu Daawood, An-Nasaa'i, At-Tirmithi and Ibn Maajah

important lesson on faith in adversity, and used as a prime example of sacrificing everything for Allah- even one's own life.

The Conquest of Mecca in 630 CE, which resulted in a Muslim victory, was the reclaiming of the city the Muslims were forced to emigrate from as a result of pressure from high ranking officials and hostile tribes. Prior to the initiation of the conquest, Muhammad and about 1400 Muslims performed the first *Umrah* or “minor pilgrimage”. When Muslim forces reached the outskirts of Mecca an emissary was sent to inform the Meccan people that the Muslims were coming to perform the ritualistic pilgrimage required. They were not permitted to enter the city in order to complete the ritual, but the Quraysh and Muslims reached an agreement that allowed Muslim entrance into the city for pilgrimage the following year. In junction with this agreement, known as *Dastur al-Hudaybiyah*, the Meccans were required to exit the city in order to allow a peaceful pilgrimage for the Muslims, Arab tribes were required to choose between the Meccans and Muslims for political alignment, and there was a required 10 years of peace between the two parties. This treaty lasted two years before a tribe aligned with the Meccans attacked and killed members of a Muslim-aligned tribe. As a result, Muhammad gathered a force of 10,000 men, and entered Mecca. Contrary to the prevalence of the *jahiliyyah* mindset in the region, Muhammad showed mercy and granted clemency to those who did not with the fight the Muslims. Upon his entrance into the city it is recorded that he said, “Those who shelter in the Kaaba are safe; those who shelter in the house of Abu Sufyan are safe, and those who remain confined to their houses are also safe.”¹⁴ *Abu Sufyan*, being an ardent enemy of Muhammad and Islam, expected to be executed for his efforts against Muslims. He was spared along with the rest of Mecca which

¹⁴ Important Events: The Conquest of Mecca. (2014, August 13). Retrieved from <https://insideislam.wisc.edu/2012/04/important-events-the-conquest-of-mecca/>

came as a surprise to Meccans given the culture of the day. Because of the mercy Muhammad showed many decided to convert to Islam. Thus, the Conquest of Mecca ended without bloodshed and concluded the years of violent warfare between the Quraysh and Muslims. The conquest remains a defining moment in Islamic history as being a catalyst for Islam's rise to prominence as a major world religion in the coming years. Following the Conquest of Mecca, which solidified the Muslim presence in the region, there were other military campaigns and expeditions which further encouraged Islam to grow as a religion in the region, and eventually as a result the world.

5. Quranic Literature and Hadithist Principles

5.1. Introduction to the Quran, The Sunnah, and The Hadith

The Qur'an is recognized by all Muslims as being the chief text and guide to living a life that is perceived as pleasing to Allah. However, without the Sunnah or the Hadith, it would be difficult for contemporary Muslims to navigate the seemingly cryptic language and structure of the Quran given that it does not offer much context to support the verses. The reason for this lack of supporting context is a result of the way in which the Quran was patched together. It is important to note that the Quran is an amalgamation of verses revealed to Muhammad over the course of 23 years, and because of the gradual piecing together of the text certain verses seem "out of place" or necessitate context from elsewhere to understand. Because of this lack of context, the Hadith and Sunnah were compiled after Muhammad's death to provide Muslims who did not know The Prophet with insight to how the Prophet would have lived in accordance to the will of Allah.

The Quran, as mentioned before, is the collection of revelations bestowed on Muhammad from *Jibril* who was sent by Allah in order to impart His divine will unto Muhammad, the last Judeo-Christian prophet, who would spread this divine knowledge to others in his society, and eventually the world. It is recognized by all Muslims as being the revealed and literal word of Allah to Muhammad, and by extension the world. It is a direct transcription of the revelations Muhammad received over the course of his life, and is viewed by Muslims as being the definitively absolute word of Allah placing it as the chief text used by Muslims throughout history. In Arabic, the word “Qur’an” literally means “recitation” or “reading”, and this literal translation of the word is carried into how the Qur’an is meant to be read by Muslims. Traditionally, Quranic verses are read aloud so that Muslims are able to align themselves with how it was revealed to and preached by Muhammad- aloud. The Qur’an is composed of 144 *surahs*, and each individual line within the text is referred to as an *ayaa*. Moreover, every *surah*, except one, begins with the phrase “*Bismillah hir-Rahman nir-Rahim*” which translates to “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful”. There are also commentaries from Muslim scholars and theologians usually found at the bottom of each page pertaining to the ayats on said page. Despite the organization of the Qur’an, there are still instances where confusion about the nature of the text is appropriate. This is the reason for most Muslims utilizing the Sunnah and the ahadith within it as supplementary texts.

Aside from the deification of Muhammad, most Muslims believe that The Prophet was the physical embodiment of what it means to live a life that is fully vested and committed to the commands of The Holy Qur’an. In many ways, Muhammad is the “archetypal Muslim”, and to preserve the credibility of this thesis he will be the basis of investigation when reviewing how

Muslims should live a life that is peaceful. ‘*Hadith*’ (*pl. ahadith*) is synonymous with the word ‘*Kalaam*’ which means “to speak” which makes sense given the components that make up the Sunnah. Each individual hadith is a reported saying, action, thought, or situation Muhammad consented to. Scholars throughout history sought out and vetted each hadith or saying to determine its authenticity in order to provide Muslims with a guide for interpreting the Qur’an through a “Muhammad-esque” lense. It is nearly impossible to correctly interpret the Qur’an without a clear understanding of The Prophet’s teachings. This is made evident in the following surah:

“Obey Allāh, and obey the Messenger. If you turn away, [know that the Messenger] is only responsible for the duty placed upon him, and you are responsible for the duty placed on you. If you obey [the Messenger], you will be rightly guided. The Messenger’s duty is only to deliver the message clearly.”¹⁵

Allah requires that Muslims follow the teachings of Muhammad so that they are able to grasp the real-world application of the text. Unlike the Qur’an, which is accepted as valid by all Muslims, a hadith has a number of steps that must be taken before it is categorized as credible. When compiling this supplementary text, there is a perceived margin of error that is taken into account when scholars are first reviewing what to include in *Al-Sunnah*, and because of this room for error there is an extensive and thorough process for determining what is and is not veritable. The Sunnah can be divided into three main categories: *Sunnah Qauliyah*, *Sunnah Fi’liyyah*, and *Sunnah Taqririyyah*. The first category refers to actual sayings of The Prophet and is synonymous with ‘hadith’, the second refers to actions, and the third refers to the approvals of The Prophet in regards to the actions of his companions. In short, a hadith is granted validity only if it has a basis in both the Qur’an and already submitted ahadith in the Sunnah or basic

¹⁵ The Holy Koran, Sūrat al-Nūr 24:54

established principles of human nature and intellect. Moreover, the hadith can not contradict the two aforementioned stipulations, and must be from a reliable source (i.e. someone who knew The Prophet personally). In order to understand the texts fully one must recognize that *al-Sunnah* and *ahadith* are not synonymous. If any contradiction is found between the text in question and already present texts as well as Muslim theological thought then the former is considered inadmissible and will not be added. *Al-Sunnah* is the general term referring to a collection of all sayings, teachings, actions, approvals, and disapprovals of The Prophet while *ahadith* refers only to the collection of sayings within *al-Sunnah* attributed to Muhammad.

It is also important to note that not every sect of Islam holds all of the hadiths in the same regard. For example, Shia Islam disregards the Sunnah *Kutub al-Sittah* (which contains six major hadiths) for historical reasons surrounding the true chain of command in the Islamic faith, while Sunni Muslims hold it in high regard. This separation of recognition in hadiths makes it difficult to find a clear consensus on certain principles within the Islamic faith, and will be explored later in this thesis.

Throughout the course of this thesis certain *ayat* and *hadiths* will be utilised to either support or refute the notion that Islam is a religion of peace. This being said, it is imperative that one knows the steps in which each of these texts will be interpreted in alignment with strategies used by scholars to extrapolate *al- tafsir* (exegesis). The Qur'an will first be used as the chief text in interpreting the theological principle in question, a Sunnah will be used as a supplementary if the Qur'an itself does not provide a clear answer, the Arabic language and Qur'anic grammar will follow if the first two steps prove unhelpful, and finally Islamic scholars will be referred to as a source of understanding if there is still confusion.

5.2. The Intermarriage of Islamic History and Quranic Literature

Comparable to any other faith tradition Islam requires one to not only be well versed in the writings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, but also have a firm grasp on the historical context surrounding each of these texts. This concept of bridging the gap between history, culture, and religious text is imperative to understanding the way in which Muslims are meant to engage with each other and others on a day-to-day basis. As mentioned before, The Quran was written in sequential steps and not in one sitting, meaning that certain *ayat* or even entire *surahs* are out of what would seem to be a logical order. George Mason University Professor of Religion David Dakake explains the importance of understanding Islamic history when reading the Qur'an through his juxtaposition of the nature of Biblical and Quranic writing structures in his essay titled *The Myth of Militant Islam*. He compares the Bible to a "flowing stream" ; as one reads the text there seems to be a flow to the narrative that naturally pieces together into a coherent meta-narrative. Contrasting this image, he equates the way in which the Qur'an is written to

"...An individual standing on a mountain at night as lightning flashes on him and in the valley below. As this individual looks out upon the landscape shrouded in darkness, he would see sudden flashes, but there would not appear to be a relationship between these different illuminated regions."¹⁶

Dakake argues that while the person standing on the mountain is able to catch a glimpse of the landscape below, they are unable to grasp a complete and comprehensive view of the valley below. He further explains that there is a relationship that is shared between all of the fragmented

¹⁶ Lumbard, J. E. (2005). *Islam, fundamentalism, and the betrayal of tradition*. New Delhi: Pentagon Press.

images, but there is not an explicit image because the complete image is hidden in darkness and must be deciphered. He elaborates on this point by addressing why the Qur'an itself can appear cryptic because it does not tell "full length stories" that the western reader may be accustomed to. At certain points the pronouncements and ayats within the Qur'an appear to be mere fragments that have no correlation to the entirety of the text. This, however, is where an understanding of Islamic history in the context of the Qur'an is imperative; because without it reading the text is essentially impossible and can lead to grosse misinterpretations. For example, one of the most commonly used *ayats* to argue that Islam is not a religion of peace appears in chapter 5, verse 51 of the Qur'an. The most common translation is as follows: "O, you who believe [in the message of Muhammad], do not take Jews and Christians as *awliya'*. They are *awliya'* to one another, and the one among you who turns to them is of them. Truly God does not guide wrongdoing folk."¹⁷ Dakake uses this example in his essay to address the incorrect interpretations a lack of understanding of Islamic history can produce. Most English translations translate the word "*awliya'*" (*sing. wali*) as "friends" which is an incorrect translation of the word given the historical context of the *ayat*. This interpretation suggests that Allah commands all Muslims to not engage in friendly relations with either Jews or Christians, however when commentaries from medieval Muslim scholars are read, the interpretations of the text are radically different.

When this verse is observed through the proper historical context, it becomes evident that the word "*awliya'*" did not mean "friends", but should in fact be interpreted as "guardians". In Arabic, it is important to note that there are many words that have multiple definitions that are

¹⁷ Ibid.

dependent on the context in which they are used. In this case, the meaning of the word should be interpreted as “guardians” despite one of its meanings being “friends”. Furthermore, traditional Quranic texts suggest that this particular verse was revealed at a critical point in the struggle to establish Islam in the Arabian peninsula. Before the revelation of this *ayat*, Muhammad and his followers had just embarked on *al-Hijra* and settled in Medina in order to escape the persecution the Meccan tribal rulers had initiated against the early Muslims in the region. It is worth mentioning that some Muslim scholars postulate that this verse was closer to the time period of the Battle of Badr, but the meaning of the verse is unchanged. The ensuing battles that the early followers of Muhammad would face posed a threat to the survival of Islam in the region as they were greatly outnumbered by the Meccans. The Meccan military forces were stronger and had more resources than the early Muslim exiles, and were prepared to essentially annihilate Muhammad and his followers from the region. Strategically it made sense for the early Muslim converts in Medina to join forces with the Jews and Christians in the region to garner more warriors that would fight alongside them, but in this *ayat* Allah commands them not to ally with peoples of other religions to fight the Meccans. In Arab culture at the time, in order to attain an alliance with members of another tribe or people group, those asking for the alliance were required to pledge their allegiance and loyalty to the group that would become their “guardians”. This pledge would also constitute the adoption of the “guardians” culture and lifestyle. This verse is merely an extension of the idea that a young group of believers who were all at the risk of annihilation could not afford to be swayed by dissenting viewpoints at such an early stage. Islamic theological texts argue that this verse was a way to inhibit the potential dissension that

could occur within Muhammad's ranks if his followers fell under the protection of surrounding Jewish and Christian tribes. Dakake edifies this point in his essay by stating:

“Indeed, from the Islamic point of view such actions, had they been allowed, would have been a kind of communal suicide that would have seriously undermined Muslim unity, broken the morale of the community and perhaps caused the many individuals taking such alliances to lack fortitude in the face of the clear and present danger of the Makkan armies and their allies.”¹⁸

Given the historical context of this particular verse juxtaposed to the way in which it is wrongly interpreted, it is easy to visualize how understanding the mindset and cultural implications of the time the verse was revealed in plays a major role in comprehending Quranic literature. Without understanding the context of the verse, it would seem as if the Qur'an is promoting a hostile attitude towards Christians and Jews, however when observing it through the lense of the time period it becomes evident that it is simply a mandate to preserve the Islamic faith in its infancy.

This is not the only verse in the Qur'an where historical context must be understood and applied to obtain a correct interpretation of the text. Throughout the text there are numerous instances where without an understanding of the culture of Arabia at the time there would be grosse interpretations. This concept will be further explored throughout this thesis to address Islam's connection with a peaceful agenda.

¹⁸ Ibid.

6. A Brief History of Christianity

6.1. Jewish Culture Before Jesus

Similarly to Pre-Islamic Arabia, the cultural practices within Israel, as well as in other surrounding territories, was a product of a tribalistic mentality based purely on one's birthright and family lineage. While there was tribal infighting and an inherent segregation between the people within society, there still was a factor governing and providing a legal code to the tribes whenever a situation necessitated it. This is contrary to Arabia which functioned as a loose confederation of lawless tribes each with their own self-made governing system-- effectively providing no wide-spread consistency within society. Jewish culture was based on a tribalistic yet an extremely traditionalist and ritualistic interpretation of holy texts that dictated the ways in which society as a whole should function in accordance with The Torah. Ancient Israel was structured in the sense that there was a written law applying to all Jews. However, many of the laws were arguably barbaric in practice or in line with a retributivist approach if broken by members in the society similarly to tribal laws within the Arabian Peninsula.

In addition to understanding the role pre-existing laws played in Jewish culture, it is also vital to recognize the role bondage played in Jewish culture. Historically, the Jews found themselves in a position of being oppressed leading up to the time of Jesus. The Egyptians, Persians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans each bested and enslaved the Jews at some point in their cultural history, effectively influencing the way in which they viewed the world in a broad sense. For example, with the lens of being oppressed they had adopted the belief that a Messiah or "deliverer" of sorts would deliver them from bondage forever. There had been multiple people throughout the history of the Jewish faith claiming to be the Messiah, including

Jesus who's central message was that he was the son of God. It is imperative that one understands the context of Ancient Jewish thought as this will aid in fully grasping why Jesus preached what he did in the ways that he did.

While an Ancient Israel was not lawless or in decay like a Pre-Islamic Arabia, there were still instances where a retributivist approach to the law was evident in accordance with Mosaic Law. In fact, any observation in regards to how The Torah is written will indicate this point. This mindset is exactly what Jesus' message called to dispel of as it was antiquated and in need of revitalization-- which he and the movement he sparked set forth to do both during his life and after his death.

6.2. The Story of Jesus Christ

Jesus of Nazareth, referred to as Jesus Christ by Christians, was a Jewish religious leader, preacher, and societal critic during the first century. Contrary to Islam, which recognizes him as a prophet of Allah, Christianity deifies him as the physical embodiment of God (YHWH)¹⁹ as well as the prophesied Messiah in the Old Testament who sparked the Christian movement in modern-day Israel and surrounding territories. The story of Jesus as well as the message that Jesus spread throughout his life before his death somewhere between 30 and 36 AD is found within the Christian text of the Bible in a section known as the "four canonical Gospels" comprised of the books Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Needless to say his influence spread

¹⁹ "Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, whose name was revealed to Moses as four Hebrew consonants (YHWH) called the tetragrammaton." Britannica, T. E. (2018, February 07). Yahweh.

Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yahweh>

much farther than the areas formerly known as Judea and Israel as he and his teachings are the basis of “neo-Christian” theological principles such as non-violence.

Jesus is known as “The Son of God” to Christians because it is believed that from his birth he was ordained by God (YHWH) to eventually be the leader of a religious movement in a time of great peril for the Jews in the region as well as deliver all of humanity from sin by dying on the cross as Christian theology suggests. Both Matthew and Luke recount the birth of Jesus in their books and describe it as nothing less than miraculous. Although they both take different approaches, with Matthew outlining the entire genealogy of Jesus in order to appeal to his Jewish audience and Luke appealing to a Gentile audience by focusing on the narrative and the many miracles surrounding it as well as the addressing the matrilineage of Jesus, this is the first instance in the Bible where a recorded birth of Jesus can be found. This is contrary to the Qur’an which has no account of Muhammad’s birth or his whereabouts before the revelations from *Jibril* were realized by him. This will make studying the narrative and message surrounding peace in regards to Jesus much simpler given that his entire life as well as theological tenets are outlined in the four canonical gospels. It is important to note that the canonical gospels are in no way a biography of the historical Jesus in a normative sense, but are allegorical and meant to convey His message in its entirety. They, along with others books of the New Testament, will be the basis of the argument that Christianity is a peaceful religion.

The “historical Jesus of Nazareth” was born in approximately 6 B.C. to Mary, wife of Joseph, in the city of Bethlehem as a result of the Census of Quirinius instituted by the Roman government. The Christian Church, specifically the Catholic Church, argues that Jesus was also born out of immaculate conception as he was conceived by The Holy Spirit. Historical texts

acknowledge that after his birth, Herod the Great, the Roman client king of Judea at the time, issued a mandate ordering all of Bethlehem's male children to be executed. It was at this time that Joseph fled the city with Mary and Jesus to Egypt where they lived before settling in the town of Nazareth, in Galilee. There are very few reliable sources recounting the childhood and adolescence of Jesus, but, despite this "lost history", the Bible provides readers with one instance from Jesus' early life in the Gospel of Luke, which recounts a story of Jesus at 12 years old travelling with his parents to an annual Passover celebration in Jerusalem. After the festival had ended, Mary and Joseph were making their way back to Nazareth, when they realized Jesus was not with them. They spent three days looking for him in Jerusalem when they eventually found him in the temple with the rabbis and priests asking questions and listening to them. When Mary inquired to find out where he had been he responded by asking, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"²⁰ Despite this story most likely being an allegory identifying the relationship between God the Father and Jesus, it is the only instance expressly mentioned in the Bible pertaining to Jesus in his youth. Following this, the story of Jesus picks up with him being around 30 years old and beginning to spread his message through his ministry. It was at this point that he was baptised by John the Baptist, and, for the first time, recognized audibly by the heavens as "The Son of God". Following his baptism, as outlined in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (known as the synoptic gospels), Jesus ventures into the wilderness for 40 days and nights where he fasts and is tempted by Satan three times. Needless to say, the Bible makes it evident that Jesus refused to succumb to the pressures of Satan even when faced with physical anguish and adversity.

²⁰ Luke 2:49

Jesus' ministry officially began once he returned back to this home region of Galilee. He procured a few disciples who followed him because of the message he was spreading. One of his most well-known and earliest disciples was the woman Mary Magdalen who is mentioned in the gospels as being a steadfast follower of Jesus from the beginning of his ministry to after his death. She is not considered a member of the "12 Apostles", who were a smaller cohort of disciples that knew Jesus best, but her story is one that most Christians regard as a life led by faith in Jesus' message. She also remains a prime example of someone in society who was not in direct contact with him at all times yet still followed his teachings religiously. Jesus' ministry is also characterized by numerous miracles taking place that are recorded within the Bible in the synoptic gospels. There are stories of Jesus dispelling demons from the bodies of people he encountered by simply speaking, healing those who were sick by simply touching them, and even rising those up from the dead by uttering the word "rise". For the purposes of this thesis, the miracles of Jesus which pertain to his teachings, his audible message heard throughout his ministry, and the his actions will be analyzed in order to grasp the full scope of the Christian dogma of peace.

As mentioned before, Christian theology argues that Jesus' death paid the price for the sins of humankind. The last days of his life have become a fixture in modern day popular culture as art and literature immediately following the end of Jesus' death as well as the Renaissance period. The scene of the last supper with Jesus and the 12 Apostles sitting and breaking bread together before he would be betrayed by one of them, found guilty in a rigged trial, and nailed to a cross where he was pierced and killed by a spear. Three days later, it is said that he rose from the dead after burial, and ascended into heaven after giving his followers what is known as The

Great Commission to go and spread his message to the ends of the earth in order to fulfill the barrier broken between humans and God after The Fall.

Jesus' life and legacy is the basis of the Christian faith tradition, and his teachings are the chief tenets utilised by Christians to live a "Christ-like" life in accordance with the scriptures and what is believed to be the mission God (YHWH) has for creation. That legacy, is one that encourages peace which is what this thesis will to explore.

6.3. Establishment of The Church

Following the death of Jesus and the assignment he commanded to his disciples known as The Great Commission, his legacy and message were spread throughout Israel. Eventually, Jesus' posthumous ministry and message would spread to other territories within the Roman Empire as the early church following grew in the regions, and Christianity became a competitor against faith traditions such as paganism, pantheism, and polytheism. The basic tenets of ministry, evangelism, and mission work were witnessed by early Christians to further expand the principles of forgiveness, repentance, monotheism, and inclusion of all people after the death of Jesus.

The book of Acts found in the New Testament recounts instances of the apostles and other disciples fulfilling this commandment throughout their lives, and arguably marks the first recorded beginnings of an established as well as organized Christian church. Acts continues the narrative of Jesus's ministry after his death and begins with the event known as Pentecost where the Holy Spirit descends and grants what is suggested by Christian theology as being the power and protection of God (YHWH) to carry out the commandment Jesus had given them. It is after

this event that Acts picks up by recounting instances where the disciples, specifically the apostles, are able to perform miracles similar to those Jesus performed throughout the gospels. The book of Acts also outlines the basic structure and everyday functions of the early church. Members of the early Christian church functioned as a quasi-socialist community as believers believed in a common property amongst themselves. This tenet of “common property” is realized in the parable of Ananias and Sapphira who were struck down by God for both lying and withholding from the community. Throughout Acts it is seen that a large number of Jews are baptized and accept Christianity in its entirety, however, despite the efforts of early church leaders, there were large sects of the Jewish community unwilling to convert and as a result many early Christians were persecuted and martyred. The story of Stephen marks a major turning point in the evangelising strategy of early church leaders who saw that they should shift their focus to Gentiles within and surrounding Israel. This shift in thought arguably initiated the beginning of the movement to bring The Great Commission to fruition. There are many instances of Gentile conversion that occur in the book of Acts, and are the beginning of Christianity’s rise to prominence throughout the world. Paul, being the author of the book of Acts established a picture of what the Christian church looked like and functioned in its early stages.

This thought process is continued in a collection of books within the New Testament known as the Pauline Epistles which are a collection of letters written by Paul to churches in other areas of the region on how to function and conduct themselves in light of certain situations plaguing them (i.e. false prophets, idolatry, corruption, etc.). These letters added another layer to the already established tenets and principles found in the book of Acts. The Pauline Epistles offered the church with a solution for a majority of the forces threatening to disestablish it in its

infant state; similar to “crisis aversion” tactics in light of opposing efforts against early Christians. As aforementioned, the epistles presented early Christians in various locations with a number of “Christ-like” solutions to whatever troubled them. For example, in Romans, Paul addresses the divide between Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus Christ urging them to understand that the message of Christ is a unifying as well as equalizing force amongst all people. This message, being one of the most prominent and profound tenet found in Christianity, was one of inclusion which threatened the traditionalist Jewish sects of the population, but attracted those who were marginalized.

Despite the efforts of the early Christians to establish themselves in the already hostile Roman Empire, they were persecuted and many were martyred due to the Christians’ widespread criticism of Roman culture and policy. Under the reign of Emperor Nero, the apostles Peter and Paul were martyred along with many other followers of Jesus’ message. Christianity had essentially become an enemy of the Roman state, and it was the goal of said state to eradicate the newly formed religion in its infancy. The Jewish rebellion against the Romans ended in 70 AD, and as a result the temple in Jerusalem was ransacked and destroyed, forcing the center of the Christian faith to move from Jerusalem to Antioch, Alexandria, and finally Rome. For nearly 80 years after the center had moved to Rome, the Christians were heavily persecuted and martyred by the Roman government due to the perceived threat they posed to societal stability and Roman culture. The trend of state ordered persecution of Christians ended in 313 AD when the Roman Emperor Constantine signs the Edict of Milan which made Christianity a legal and protected religion under Roman law. His decision to cease the persecutions against Christians during his reign was a major turning point for the early Christian church which now had room to expand

and continue carrying out The Great Commission only publicly. It could be argued that all post-Constantine Christians owe the survival of the church and faith tradition to him signing the Edict of Milan.

Under Constantine's reign, the first ecumenical council is called to order in Nicea which is the first concerted effort from church leaders to establish a basis for the Christian faith and streamline theological prose. As a result of this, the Nicene Creed is formulated and adopted by early church leaders, and by extension, early Christians. However, like any other agreement made between groups of people deciding a common set of ideological beliefs, the Nicene Creed had multiple renditions before resulting in what is now used by all Christian churches as a credo to establish the fundamental theological principles of the faith.

In the year 1054 AD, there was a schism in the Christian church resulting in what are now the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church. This rift in the church was caused by an amalgamation of political discord as well as basic theological differences. For example, a majority of the strife was a result of ecclesiastical disagreements between the two sects as they sought to affirm the fundamental "universal" Christians truths coupled with their own cultural practices. These arguments surrounded principles such as church leadership, baptism, and the taking of the eucharist. Members of the Eastern Orthodox Church rejected the idea of papal supremacy that placed the Pope as the head of the Catholic Church as well as divine authority between God and the rest of humankind. They argued against this hierarchical structure still used in the Catholic Church today, and instead believed that every bishop should be viewed as "ontologically equal" holding strong to the common union of all churches. In Roman Catholicism, the Pope is given absolute authority on theological matters and is in many

ways a domineering figure that has the last say -- exactly what the early Eastern Orthodox Church was attempting to combat. Another example of a theological principle separating the two is the concept of Purgatory which is equivalent to a state between heaven and hell that allows for “purification of an imperfect but not damned soul” . The Catholic Church has instilled this principle into their theological dogma which the Orthodox Church refuted. The disagreement surrounding these foundational theological and ecclesiastical principles as well as political pressures (mostly initiated by the western church) resulted in the mutual excommunication of both churches in 1054 AD leading to the first schism in the Christian religion.

For the next 50 years following The Great Schism, the Church initiated a series of expeditions meant to reclaim lost holy land known as The Crusades. These religious wars were sanctioned by the church to reclaim lands said to have been stolen, and eliminate the Muslim threat in regions argued to have belonged to the Christians. Pope Urban II authorized the first Crusade to recover that the Turks had began to take over. Initially, the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos had sent troops to thwart the encroaching Turkish forces, but was easily defeated. He requested the aid of Pope Urban II who was initially apprehensive, but was later persuaded by aristocrats to send aid. The aid sent by the Catholic Church totalled approximately 10,000 people made up of combatants as well as non-combatants which offered a noticeable advantage to Christian forces that ultimately resulted in the crushing defeat of Muslim forces. The Christian forces claimed land, massacred thousands of Muslims during the First Crusade, and established themselves in regions as a prominent military force and eventually increasingly widespread religion. The goal was to hinder and reclaim land taken during the Muslim expansion period resulting in both a growing geopolitical scope for Christianity as well as dividing the

Muslim world geographically. This first expedition also aroused a newfound fervor in Christians to go to battle in the “holy wars” to reclaim land lost to the Muslims in prior years.

Popes following Urban II initiated campaigns and crusades of their own to capitalize on the momentum as well as aforementioned support within the masses for the expeditions. During the 12th and 13th centuries subsequent expeditions were led to fight Muslim armies and contract to specific crusader states within Europe. The 12th century is when the invention of indulgences is created by the Catholic Church to incentivize groups of Christians to fight alongside crusaders against their enemies. The church's political gain via the incentives of indulgences will be a central reason for a split later in the church between Catholicism and Lutheranism. Throughout these crusades, attacks were led against Jews throughout the regions now known as Germany, France, and other European nations which was sparked by the political capital that could be gained and support for the crusader expeditions. Altogether there were four major crusades which were either a response to Muslim attacks or “land recovery” expeditions for the Christian church thus increasing its reach as a religious superpower and initiating a culture of eliminating threats later realized in historical events such as The Spanish Inquisition. Eventually, these crusades fizzled out of popularity due to what most historians characterize as being a lack of long-standing armies because of the short-lived “religious pilgrimage” and “spiritual highs” they offered. The lack of long-standing military conquests eventually led to the end of The Crusades in the 13th Century. The city of Constantinople became a central fixture fought over between the Jews, Christians, and Muslims as a stronghold. For a time the city was held by each before 1453 AD when the city was taken over by the Ottoman Turks.

The next major split within the Christian church occurred with Martin Luther who vehemently opposed the way in which the Catholic Church conducted its theological practices-- more specifically the use of indulgences as an incentive to donate money to the church.

Indulgences were used as a tool to effectively acquire more funds from adherents of the faith by selling them to receive blessings from God or get one's family members out of purgatory. Luther argued that the use of indulgences was found nowhere in the Bible and in fact argued that many of the Catholic Church's practices were heretical. He published his 95 theses addressing subjects such as papal supremacy, the selling of indulgences, and justification by works versus faith. His criticism of the Catholic Church led to his excommunication after the trial known as the Diet of Worms where the Pope and Catholic Church by extension found him guilty of heresy. His teachings and admonitions directed at the Catholic Church led to the split from the Catholic Church that formed Protestantism. Other Christian denominations broke away from Protestantism due to one reason or another and are a part of the seemingly complex tree that is the Christian faith.

6.4. Intermarriage of History and Christian Thought

It is vital that the Christian church history is known before addressing the Christian view on peace given that each separate denomination has theological principles making each distinct despite recognizing the foundational tenets found in the Nicene Creed. It will also become apparent that this is vital to understanding the full scope of Christian thought in regards to peace as well as understanding the evolution of Christian thought and application from the church's infancy until where it is now. Despite the theologies surrounding each of the different denominations, the basic tenets surrounding the subject of peace should remain the same given

the origins of the Christian faith. This will be explored later in this thesis as Christianity as a whole will be reviewed with evidence supported by the historical context surrounding the church (i.e. the early church, The Crusades).

To understand any faith tradition as well as the theological principles that surround it, one must first understand the history leading up to its founding in conjunction with the actual message being preached. In the case of Jesus, and the message that would later become Christianity, one must realize that the reality of the culture in which he was in had an already established way of living that contradicted many of his teachings. For example, the book of John recounts a story where a woman who is caught in the act of adultery is placed on trial and condemned to a public stoning. Jesus, who happens to be near where this is occurring, is asked what the fate of the woman should be as Mosaic Law expressly argues that the punishment for adultery is stoning. Those asking were attempting to trap him because if he dissented from Mosaic Law he would be labeled a heretic, but if he agreed with them then he was audibly contradicting his message of forgiveness. Jesus responded by saying, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone”²¹. This response was a fairly overt way in which Jesus addressed Pharisaical hypocrisy as well as the treatment of women in Jewish society at the time. Without an in depth understanding of Jewish culture, the way in which Jesus responded has no meaning and thus, a portion of his message would be lost. Jewish law perpetuated a culture that went out of its way to find women at fault or disregard feminine objection in trial, so Jesus’ statement absolving the woman of her alleged crimes was not only bucking an established system, but also addresses the gender inequality within society. This instance is only one where

²¹ John 8:7

understanding the societal context aids one in conceptualizing the extent of how radical Jesus' message was.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus rejects both revenge and retaliation in arguably his most well-known sermon known as The Sermon on the Mount where he disestablishes and disavows the cultural reality that Mosaic Law perpetuated-- the "eye for an eye" retributivist theory of justice seen in many ancient civilizations. The most well known verse in this sermon is still used today as a lesson on peace and nonviolent protest: "But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."²² Without understanding the historical and cultural context of this verse it would be easy to extrapolate a watered down interpretation of Jesus' meaning when he said this. An incomplete interpretation of this verse would constitute one arguing that Jesus is simply rejecting the concepts of retaliation and vindictiveness by saying "if someone slaps your cheek don't hit them back, but instead let them hit you again". This "sunday school" answer is incomplete and without a proper grasp of the cultural context in addition to this verse one would be missing a large portion of Jesus' message in regards to peace and retaliation. To begin understanding this message presented in this anecdote one has to first realize that culturally a person would generally be struck on the cheek when put on trial by the Pharisees and/or Sadducees. To turn one's cheek in order to get slapped again overtly signifies two premises: One, the person was wrongly accused and is calling out the Pharisaical culture of hypocrisy, and two, the person is insulting a broken system without taking up arms against it. This message coupled with the cultural context of the time period presents those reading the text with a new layer to the ministry of Jesus. Not only did he preach

²² Matthew 5:39

non-violence, but he preached utilising non-violence as a tool for addressing the flaws in an antiquated and flawed society.

These two instances are not the only ones where it is necessary to understand cultural as well as historical context before drawing a conclusion on a verse within the New Testament. A clear and broad knowledge of the way in which Jewish culture functioned before the introduction of Christian doctrine is vital and imperative in grasping the societal implications of the message that Jesus spread throughout the region both during his life and posthumously. By taking into account the cultural and societal situations both before and during Jesus' time it becomes apparent to any reader that his goal was to address and eventually eradicate the hypocritical and archaic way of life present in Jewish society. This will be explored throughout this thesis with the subject of peace being the chief lens utilised in giving his teachings real-world application. Jesus directed his disciples to live a life that was inherently peaceful and free of violence in any form towards others by confronting confrontation with non-violent civil disobedience.

7. The Islamic Perspective on Peace in Society

7.1. Jihad

Often times in western media when the concept of *jihad*²³ is addressed it carries a negative connotation brought about by ill sourced assumptions and inflammatory language meant to produce a reactionary response with some sort of greater political reasoning behind it. Examples of this would be language introduced into the media after the infamous attacks on The World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, or the world's reaction anytime a terrorist group

²³ "The Arabic word "jihad" is often translated as "holy war," but in a purely linguistic sense, the word "jihad" means struggle or striving." A. (n.d.). ISCA. Retrieved from <http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/5-jihad-a-misunderstood-concept-from-islam.html?start=9>

claims Islam as being the chief reason for their violent rhetoric and actions. The theological tenet of *jihad* present in Islam will be explored in this next section as it attempts to address the correct lens through which this word should be viewed when trying to figure out if Islam is a peaceful religion. A basic understanding of *jihad*, along with the theological underpinnings, and application of this word in day-to-day life will be reviewed in order to affirm the notion presented in this thesis that Islam is inherently a religion of peace. It is important to note that this word will be reviewed not only in the contemporary or “moderate Muslim” worldview, but also through a traditionalist and extremist point of view in order to supply an all encompassing understanding of the way in which this word can be both correctly applied or misconstrued (the latter ultimately lead to gross misinterpretations from any onlooker of the religion). An interesting note is that a large majority of Muslim scholars divided the concept of jihad even further into *Dar al-Harb* (House of War) and *Dar al-Salaam* (House of Peace) arguing that one is not a true Muslim until completely submitting to the former. After the introspective concept of *jihad* is explored, this section of the thesis will be expanded to an extrospective viewpoint an analysis to grapple with how Muslims are called to address members outside of their community. This multi-faceted analysis is meant to encompass all aspects of this particular concept as well dispel misnomers surrounding its actual meaning and application in order to provide a comprehensive and well sourced viewpoint on this Arabic word often times used without a true understanding of its origins.

Before addressing the complexities surrounding the word, it would be fair to give a basic idea as to what *jihad* means. A literal translation of the word from Arabic to English is “to strive” which is contrary to the popular misinterpretation that it means “holy war”. In fact, the

term “holy war” which will become relevant to this discussion later, is a direct translation from the words *qital* or *harb* as found in the Qur’an depending on the context in which it is used. This “striving” refers to the way in which Muslims strive to either better themselves or achieve an ideal standard that is pleasing in the eyes of Allah in every way. This is described as being an ongoing battle that one faces throughout their entire life as one must continually strive to please Allah in every facet of their personal as well as spiritual life. This concept of *jihad* is quite complex and encapsulates much more than a surface level understanding of its definition such as feeding the poor, praying five times a day, abstaining from alcohol and drugs, etc.

The theological principle of *jihad* is two-pronged in essence and is separated into two distinct aspects: the physical and the spiritual. Otherwise known as the *asghar* and *akbar* meaning “the lesser jihad” and “the greater jihad” respectively. The next sections in the thesis will address the role of the greater and lesser jihad in Islam and how these two subsections of jihad relate to the concept of peace as well as how Muslims are meant to live their lives according to the Qur’an and Muhammad’s teachings. This will bridge the gap between an overly simplistic and reductionist view of the concept as *jihad* is neither purely martial in essence or spiritual, but an amalgamation of the two. It would be an incorrect interpretation to assume either extreme of the spectrum: that jihad is either purely militaristic or purely a self-contained or personal effort. Dakake addresses this dichotomy by stating that “the balance that The Prophet made evident between the two poles of *jihad* is neglected by some modern Islamic groups that seek to change the hearts and minds purely from ‘the outside’”²⁴ (i.e.

²⁴ Lumbard, J. E. (2005). *Islam, fundamentalism, and the betrayal of tradition*. New Delhi: Pentagon Press.

Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, ISIS, etc.). The term *wasat*, effectively stylized by the Prophet Muhammad in the Hadith, characterizes the dualistic nature of Islam as it translates to the “middle” and “balanced” way in which Muslims are meant to go about living life. Failure to recognize Muhammad’s command to turn away from extremes have encourage Islamic extremist groups to incorrectly interpret the concept of *jihad*. These gross misinterpretations and misappropriations of the text result in casualties and fatalities that ultimately distort the way in which Islam is viewed. Conversely, an interpretation that Islam is a purely pacifist religion would be incorrect. While Islam is a religion that promotes peace, to negate the physical embodiment of *jihad* would be irresponsible as it would be a tacit denial of the physical portion of Islam’s history as well as anything within The Qur’an that references the *asghar*.

This being said, it must be made clear that the theological principle of *jihad* found in Islam that is often times incorrectly addressed, and in order to truly understand the complex nature of the relationship between Islam and peace one must pass this roadblock. Jihad is a bifurcated concept that will be broken down and addressed in the following sections in its entirety to initiate the discussion of Islam being a religion that promotes peace.

7.2. The Greater Jihad

The sometimes forgotten aspect of jihad that is often not addressed in modern circles is known as the “greater” of the two *jihads*. The *akbar* refers to the spiritualized aspect of jihad that both Muslims and non-Muslims experience. In a sense, it is the effort against temptations, wrongdoings, and actions displeasing to Allah. This could take many forms and spans much farther than the actions of an individual. *Akbar* is the way in which one also deals with personal demons and personal temptations in their daily life. The goal is to live a life that is pleasing to

Allah and is in line with the rhetoric within The Qur'an. Muhammad set the stage for what a life lived in the way of Allah is meant to be, and Muslims are meant to follow his life as well as teachings in their everyday situations by referring to the Qur'an as well as Hadiths for guidance. While this is only one aspect of *jihad* as a whole, it is important to note that this being the "greater" of the two is a testament of Islam's greater mission as a religion that promotes peaceful first and foremost.

7.3. The Lesser Jihad

In order to fully grasp the reality of what it means to live a life that has aspects of *jihad* in it one must understand the "lesser" of the two aspects within this Islamic theological tenet. The *akbar* refers to the "lesser *jihad*" which is the martial characteristic of jihadism that calls for physical action against aggressors. Before analyzing the application of this portion of Islamic theology, one must first begin by dispelling incorrect misnomers that may arise from this. Underneath the umbrella of *asgar* there is the concept of *qital* which directly translates to "armed fighting". This is the concept of taking up arms to fight in the name or honor of Allah and Islam as a whole. A misguided view of *qital* would connote that Muslims are commissioned to fight whenever they so please as long as they claim it "in the name of Allah", but needless to say, this is an incorrect interpretation as it equates Islam with warfare as well as fails to address the historical context and origins of this particular concept. As mentioned before, this is either the result of "sheer ignorance or political agendas meant to breed animosity between different people groups"²⁵ as Dakaka mentions in one of his essays. It would be irresponsible, on the part of the scholar, to write a thesis either watering the concept of *jihad* down or approaching the *asgar* with

²⁵ Ibid.

an overwhelmingly biased and ill sourced viewpoint. The goal is writing this thesis will be to objectively approach the next sections to clear the air of any questions and allow for the answer to make itself apparent.

This form of *jihad* is only acceptable when Muslims are either being attacked by an opposing force or being oppressed by another people group to which the only response is an armed resistance to end said oppression. This is directly stated in the Qur'an: "Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked because they have been oppressed – Allah indeed has power to grant them victory – those who have been unjustly driven from their homes, only because they said: ."²⁶ Also the following verse edifies the already stated point that Muslims are not called to be violent, but are instead given permission to defend:

"Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors. Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed.... Fight against them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme."²⁷

A clear understanding of Islam's history is vital when analyzing the context of this particular verse as it pertains to the time period in the beginnings of Islam when the early Muslims were persecuted and being driven out of Mecca. This points towards the aforementioned assertion that the only time a Muslim is allowed to respond to violence with violence is when there is an attack on the Muslim community from an oppressor. Extremist groups claiming Islam often times use this verse as a justification for their actions and agendas that are vindictive and politically driven by nature. Their misguided interpretation and convolution of the text is in no way a correct interpretation nor is it one that represents Islam as a whole as some may be led to believe. With

²⁶ The Holy Qur'an

²⁷ The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah 2:190

this logic it can be concluded that these groups are not practicing true Islam, and are in fact parcing Quranic literature to fit their agendas that promote violence and destruction.

With the basics of the *jihad* explained the next step is understanding how the latter is applied to those who are not Muslim. What does the relationship between a Muslim and non-Muslim look like in accordance with Qur'an? How are Muslims called to engage with those who are not believers? The text surrounding violence against non-believers will be explored in the next section in order to address the outward application of the lesser jihad as outlined in earlier. This will also address the role peace plays in Islam in relation to members not within the Muslim community.

7.4. Violence Towards Non-Muslims

When citing the role *jihad* and the effort to preserve Islam plays in the everyday life of Muslims, the conversation eventually shifts towards a discussion surrounding the way in which Muslims are called to interact with those who are not Muslims. The role that non-Muslims played in the history of Islam's formative years was vital when the early Muslims were in need of refuge as they were being persecuted and exiled out of Mecca. The *ansar*, or the "non believers", are referenced multiple times throughout the Qur'an as well as the Hadith as a point of reference for how Muslims should engage with those who do not believe in the teachings the Qur'an. First and foremost, the idea that Muslims are called to wage war against those who do not believe the same as them is an incorrect and misguided interpretation of certain verses and instances within the Qur'an as well as other supplemental texts. For example, a verse often times cited as being one that calls for violence against the *muhajirin* is referred to earlier in this thesis as a means of bridging the gap between the religious text and historical context. The subject is

often times incorrectly interpreted as commanding Muslims to not take Jews and Christians as “friends”. However, when analyzed through the proper historical lens, it becomes apparent that the word used can either mean “friends” or “guardians” and it should be read as the latter in this context given Muhammad’s goal of maintaining loyalty as well as the survival of Islam in its infant stages. To reiterate a point that has already been mentioned, a Muslim is not permitted to take up arms against anyone unless it is a defensive retaliatory response where taking up arms is the only plausible reaction.

Muslims, in a manner of speaking, are also called to go out and preach the message of Allah to non Muslims. This preaching falls into the same category as other interactions with the *muhajirin* as Muslims are explicitly commanded to approach these encounters with peaceful rhetoric, an open mind, and a receptive spirit in order to represent Islam correctly when preaching the Qur’an. This can be found in the Qur’an when it references this instance by stating, “And argue not with the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islamic Monotheism with His Verses), except with such of them as do wrong.”²⁸ The Qur’an makes it evident that Muslims are called to being peaceful in how they approach non-Muslims when sharing their religion as this ultimately translates into other aspects of life. Contrary to the rhetoric of the contemporary fundamentalist groups, that have adopted a dogma perpetuating an inherently violent rhetoric, true Islam requires a peaceful approach to spreading the message of Allah.

Also addressed in Qur’an, is the way in which Muslims are called to protect those who are non-Muslims if their help is needed. The verse “And if anyone of the Mushrikoon

²⁸ The Holy Qur’an, Surah Ankabut 29:46

(polytheists, idolaters, pagans, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah) seeks your protection then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allaah (the Qur'aan) and then escort him to where he can be secure.”²⁹ The historical context of this is simply that when the early Muslims first fled to Medina during *al-Hijra*, they had made a truce of sorts with the muhajirin where they had both agreed to protecting one another in case of attacks from the Meccans who was their mutual enemy. Historically, it made sense for the early Muslims to protect the *muhajirin* in their formative years given them being weaker in numbers and status throughout the region. This verse coupled with the aforementioned one addressing how Muslims should regard non-Muslims in preaching, along with other similar verses, give the impression that Islam calls for peace towards both other Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Moderates, Fundamentalism, and Extremism in Islam

Jihad is a tenet seen throughout all of Islam, and for the most part it is recognized by all Muslims as being a key concept within Islamic theology. Despite this seemingly universal concept within the Muslim community, there is still much contention between different factions about the way in which *jihad* is meant to be applied in the Muslim walk. Originally this thesis was going to attempt in analyzing the way in which each specific denomination of Islam viewed *jihad* as well as other concepts within Islam to eventually lead to an overarching conclusion as to how Islam as a whole views peace. However, this approach seems inefficient as each denomination could be broken down into three broad sections: Moderate, Fundamentalist, and Extremist Muslims. This broader approach will make it much simpler to view both how Islam has evolved as a whole throughout its history as well as how the concept of peace is viewed

²⁹ The Holy Qur'an, Surah Tawbah 9:1

throughout the entire Muslim community. Examining the three larger categories will eliminate the possibility of painting a specific denomination with a monolithic brush in order to prove a point.

Moderate Islam has always been a point of contention within the Muslim community given the relationship Muslims are meant to have with the Qur'an as well as other supplementary texts-- one of unwavering faith and devotion. The concept of moderate Islam is similar to the "loose constructionist" mindset often used by "forward thinkers" in regards to the Constitution as it calls for a reformed thought process about the legal codes and theological principles within the religion to fit the changing times. In a literal sense, moderate behavior is the practice of following the religious text, but through the lense of the current time period in order to apply it correctly. Culturally, this concept is somewhat frowned upon because it can be misconstrued as parsing Quranic literature to fit one's own personal agenda or beliefs, but modernism addresses the subjects that fundamentalism fails to do as times change. Muhammad's teachings, for the most part, mean nothing without their historical context as they were dependent on said context, but as an understanding of context is divulged with more people studying Quranic literature and the Hadith, it becomes clear that certain practices only made sense in the time period of Muhammad and should be read in a descriptive context. Moderate practicing Muslims do not discount the descriptive qualities of certain Quranic verses, but simply read them through the lense of their application today. In regards to *jihad* and peace, most moderate Muslims recognize that the greater of the two aspects within *jihad* should be primary and solely the main way they should live their lives as Islam does not call for Muslims to go out of their way to harm others. However, they also recognize that Islam is in no way a pacifist religion due to the concept of

asgar which constitutes martial action from Muslims in the case of self defense or to overthrow an oppressive regime. Historically, it is also evident that with a moderate approach to Islam positive change is the result. For example, prior to the Iranian Revolution which took place in the 1970s, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi instituted a quasi-moderate theocratic monarchy in Iran. Throughout the entire Arab world there is an ongoing dispute between moderates as well as fundamentalists, and because of this the shifts in power throughout Islam's history have gone in waves from one end of the ideological spectrum to the other. It is important to not that "fundamentalists" take no regard of the current time period and read the text in a literal sense while the moderate attempts to review the historical context in order to correctly apply it in a contemporary sense.

When Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah after the Iranian Revolution, he instituted a strict fundamentalist regime that morphed from a "by the book" interpretation to a "puritanical" interpretation that was neither sourced correctly or current with the times. For example, the implementation of women being forced to wear hijabs and other body coverings in order to sustain the perceived purist society that he had hoped for was initiated under Ayatollah Khomeini's regime. While his hopes as a fundamentalist were to eradicate saturnalian culture within Iran, he completely failed to correctly interpret what Muhammad said in regards to women and covering their bodies. It is important to note that the practice of peace extends farther than a battle, but actually translates into other aspects of life. For example, the treatment of women and basic freedoms given to human beings in regards to subjects such as freedom of religion. Not only did the Iranian government criminalize a woman's failure to wear a hijab, there was also the perceived notion of violence towards anyone who was either a non-Muslim or

not practicing the Islam perpetuated under the Khomeini regime. This does not fall in line with Muhammad's teachings of women or non-Muslims, thus leading one to conclude that in this aspect fundamentalists are not following true Islam. This is not to say moderate Islam is the "right" Islam, but simply in regards to peace and fair treatment of others, the moderate Muslims have an easier time conceptualizing and applying Muhammad's actual teachings. This translates into *jihad* where one could postulate that a moderate Muslim would only utilise armed force as a last resort, similarly to Muhammad, whereas a fundamentalist would be more apt to approaching a situation with an armed resistance. Again, this is not to say that fundamentalism is inherently an incorrect way to practice Islam, but simply that the nuance of how each of these two schools of thought would approach violence as well as treatment of others would be drastically different. The fact that there is even a sect of Muslims living in a peaceful way in accordance with the text and example set by Muhammad points towards Islam being a religion of peace at its core.

Islamic extremism is equivocal to terrorism as a majority of extremists tend use a warped interpretation of the Qur'an to justify violence. Examples of this gross misjudgement and manipulation of the text can be seen in organizations such as Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and ISIS which use the text as a justification of violence ultimately contradicting Muhammad's intentions. Muhammad lived a peaceful life and had a goal of obtaining peace through diplomacy and *akbar* unless a situation necessitates the use of armed force. These groups have effectively taken the martial aspect of Islam to base their own theology which is not the way in which Islam is meant to be practiced. Muhammad's goal was not to use violence as a means of obtaining peace or spreading the message of Allah, but did not discount the use of warfare if a situation necessitated it. This is comparable to when a country's military utilises force to end an oppressive situation or

fight an attacker. This is generally a last resort as the effort to gain man power and go to war is pragmatically much more costly than diplomacy, but it is used as a response if the situation necessitates it (i.e. WWII).

It is important to acknowledge the three main ways in which Islam can be interpreted as this will make understanding the way in which Muslims can view their text and ultimately view living a life that promotes peace. The comparison between the three contemporary categories and Muhammad also provides clearer testament to what Islam is about at its core. As this thesis will continue to explore, Islam is a religion that, while it is not pacifist, does promote peace in all aspects of life.

8. The Implementation of the Texts

8.1. The Quran and Peace

With a better understanding of the historical context as well as possible factionalism that can occur within the Muslim community due to the many ways the text can be interpreted the discussion of how peace as well as violence within the Qur'an are addressed can be discussed in a broader sense. In regarding how peace and violence are both simultaneously addressed in the Qur'an, this section will coalesce the aforementioned points of historical context and Quranic literature to lead towards the notion that Islam inherently a religion of peace. As aforementioned, the concept of *wasatiyyah*, which is found in both the Hadith and the Qur'an, establishes that Muslims are not to live a life on either extreme of the peace-violence spectrum. The idea of pacifism does not align with the central tenets of Islam as it completely negates the historical reality of Islam's founding as well as the martial aspect within *jihad*. Conversely, a rendering of the text resulting in extreme militarism also is incorrect as it disallows for the implementation of

the greater peaceful lifestyle that Muhammad primarily called for. Furthermore, a purely martial interpretation of Islam eliminates the purpose of the Qur'an as a whole. By reviewing the historical context both leading up to and during Islam's beginnings in the Arabian peninsula, it becomes apparent that the primary goal of the Qur'an was to eliminate the present spirit of *jahil* within society as the territory primarily functioned as a lawless, brutal, and debauched setting. It is made evident by the way in which the Qur'an is written as well as the historical happenings surrounding its introduction into the world that the central purpose for it being written was to eliminate the ongoing established heritage in the region described as being a period of ignorance. A regressive application of the text would be a purely militaristic one as it presents a dogma perpetuating the exact culture Muhammad and the Qur'an actively combated. An active rhetoric of violence and actions that follow as a result are a product of the jahil period prior to Islam as groups such as ISIS and other groups with similar dogmatic themes are engaged in a regressive retributivist tribal warfare mentality-- this being a hallmark of *jahiliyyah*. These groups utilise selective Quranic observation and *falsafa* to justify acts of violence despite the reality of the text as a whole.

For example, modern militant Islamism, referred to as "*jihadi-Salafism*", functions by continually parsing Quranic language and literature in order to successfully inculcate large followings of adherents with an incorrect and militant interpretation of the Qur'an. Often times, this is due to a purposeful misinterpretation of the actual wording or the historical context surrounding a specific verse. A popularized example has already been mentioned twice before in this thesis as an excuse for Muslims to wage military action against *al-muhajirin* because of the mistranslation of one word. The application of specific dicta to fit one's purpose can be seen

throughout the history of the world in essentially any case, and Islam is not exempt from that reality as groups are quick to apply incorrect interpretations to fit their regressive agenda. As outlined previously in this thesis, there are verses within the Qur'an that overtly call for peace and the use nonviolence when interacting with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It would be a drastic miscalculation to argue that any of these verses are somehow addressing anything other than peace even in the most conspicuous cases. A more logical approach would be to analyze any verses that may seem to contradict this observation in their entirety and through the lense of a seventh century Muslim before committing the equivocation fallacy and generalising Islam as a whole. Some verses often pulled from the Qur'an as "justifiers of Islam's inherent violent streak" will now be reviewed in the way in which they can be misconstrued versus their actual meaning along with historical context and deductive reasoning.

The following example is just one of many where a failure to acknowledge what follows as well as the historical context of the passage can initiate an incorrect interpretation of the Qur'an as a whole. The following verse is often used by critics of Islam as well as extremists to justify violence towards unbelievers: "Verily, the worst of beasts in the sight of God are those who conceal (the truth), and do not acknowledge it..."³⁰ This can easily be read as the non-believers being referred to as "the worst of beasts". After all, this verse is actually directed towards the way in which Muhammad's followers should interact with a group of non-believers in Medina following *al-Hijra*. A Muslims critic or extremist, both with the goal of characterizing Islam as a religion that calls for hatred towards non-believers, would mutually end their reading here to fit their pernicious agendas. However, a scholarly approach would recognize this as being

³⁰ The Holy Qur'an

a harmful way in which one would go about reading the Qur'an as it distorts the way in which this verse should be interpreted. A complete reading of the verse is as follows: "Verily, the worst of beasts in the sight of God are those who conceal (the truth), and do not acknowledge it. These are *those* whom you have made a peace treaty with, but they break their treaty at every opportunity and have no fear of the law."³¹ Read completely through, it becomes evident that the "worst beasts" refers to those who have broken some sort of treaty with the Muslims, and an understanding of Islamic history would suggest that this is referencing the *Dastur al-Madinah* which functioned as a peace treaty between the early Muslims and non-Muslims following the Muslim emigration from Mecca. Logically, this makes sense as why *al-muhajirin* would be referred as this given the aforementioned central goal of the Qur'an-- to eliminate the "backstabbing" as well as "treachery" within the society, and the breaking of a treaty is one way to promote said "backstabbing" and "treachery". It becomes clear how a verse such as this could be easily misconstrued to reflect a contemptuous relationship between *al-muhajirin*, but instead a specific group at a specific time within Islamic history.

The following two verses are often forgotten as they set a precedent for the way Muslims are meant to regard seemingly "violent verses" within the Qur'an:

"As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably.

God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards such as fight against you because of [your] faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid [others] in driving you forth: and as for those [from among you] who turn towards them in friendship; it is they, they who are truly wrongdoers!"³²

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

By reading this, it becomes obvious that any interpretation deviating from the “martial action in defense” narrative actually is incorrect and in direct contradiction of the Qur’an itself as these verse make it evident that the only time any anger should be shown towards anyone outside of the Muslim community is when they go out of their way to show prejudice or threaten the very existence of Muslims simply because of their faith. This is where the previously mentioned point of martial action only being appropriate in cases of persecution or oppression, as seen numerous times throughout the history of Islam, takes action as it is more so about the defense of Islam and not the forceful institution of Islam.

Furthermore, to address the confusion of those who address the Qur’an versus those that address it “liberally”, it is important to note that given proof supplied thus far, those who are interpreting the Qur’an as a religion that promotes peace are actually interpreting in a literal sense. It is those that argue Islam as being either a pacifist religion or solely militaristic via parsing the Qur’an that are warping the texts, history, and meaning of Islam.

8.2. The Sunnah and Peace

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the two chief texts in Islam are the Qur’an, for obvious reasons, and the Sunnah-- a collection of Muhammad’s sayings and actions throughout his life. The text of the Sunnah is broken into numerous books, each called a hadith, containing the previously mentioned actions, sayings, responses, and teachings of The Prophet. Most Muslims recognize that is dangerous to interpret one sans the other and often will refer to the Sunnah as a means of understanding how Muhammad would have responded in a situation if the text within the Qur’an is not easily interpreted. Similarly, whenever a supposed saying of Muhammad is preached or reference, the Qur’an and the theological tenets found within it can be used to check the validity of a claim. When referring to peace

and violence within Islam, the way in which Muhammad responds to situations will give a clear indication as to how one should go about viewing how the Qur'an should be interpreted. It is vital to bridge this gap as it pertains to fully grasping the dichotomy between peace and violence within Islam in relation to this thesis. Understanding the root of Islam in its entirety is what the Sunnah provides, and having a grasp over the first practitioner of Islam's actions is important as it will depict the literal application from the source of the religion.

Before even analysing the text of the Sunnah, it should be made known that not every hadith is considered "credible" by the entire Muslim population. In fact, there are only a select few of which the majority of Muslims view as credible enough to be taken into consideration when placed alongside the Qur'an as a reference point. The exclusivity of the hadiths that are viewed as formidable texts to be reviewed lends itself to the extensive process used in order to validate new hadiths as it requires whomever is presenting it as valid to trace it back to either Muhammad himself or one of his confidants that witnessed him saying or doing whatever action is proposed. This approach to weeding through the ill sourced or even fabricated hadiths allows for the correct message to be added to the Sunnah in order to maintain constancy in the message presented in the Qur'an. The instances where fabricated renderings of what the Prophet Muhammad has said, done, or thought in his life have been seen throughout history, and are a result of political movements, heretics attempting to disestablish Islam, particular schools of thought attempting to distort the texts, or even jurisprudential rivalry within the Muslim community. Writings within the credible hadiths are not arbitrarily thrown into the Sunnah simply because a person claimed the Prophet uttered a series of words or took part in a particular action, but instead each of the proposed sayings were reviewed and studied extensively by Muslim scholars before adding them to the collection. Similarly to Christian church fathers who were deciding the contents and order of the final canon, early Muslim scholars established a set of guidelines that acted as an indicator of whether or not a hadith was valid. The classifications of hadithic texts range from *maqbul/ mutawatir*, the highest classification of

hadith, to *mardud/Da'if* which is the lowest ranking classifying a weak and ill-soured hadith. The criteria for these hadiths is as follows:

- Looking for contradiction with the Qur'an
- Looking for contradiction with mutawatir ahadith
- Looking for contradiction with decisively-established principles deduced from the Qur'an and/or mutawatir ahadith
- Looking for implausible details, such as promise of an incommensurately huge reward or punishment for something.
- Judging the content in the context of the entirety of hadith literature. Needless to say, this can only be attempted by a specialist with wide and intense familiarity with the sunnah developed over a long period of immersion study. It can be likened to the way in which someone who has lived with a person for a prolonged period becomes familiar with that person's style and topics of speech, and as a result can sometimes easily recognize a saying which has been falsely attributed to the person.³³

For the purposes of this thesis, the two most credible and widely agreed upon hadiths, *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, will be the primary sources of reference in this section. This is in order to provide consistency given that this thesis is a review of Islam as a whole, and due to these two being held in high regard by most of the Muslim community, it will offer a broad yet comprehensive review into how peace and violence are viewed in the Sunnah.

The concept of being an apostate and turning one's back on Islam is referenced multiple times within the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and is usually followed with the punishment of death within the text. Ahadith such as "Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him" are often utilised as ammunition to characterize Islam as a whole as violent without reviewing the historical context and cultural implications that these ahadith address. Another commonly utilised ahadith to perpetuate the aforementioned point is as follows:

"The blood of a Muslim who confesses that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: In

³³ An Introduction To The Science Of Hadith: The Classification Of Hadith According To The Reliability And Memory Of Reporters. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/Ulum/asb7.html>

Qisas for murder, a married person who commits illegal sexual intercourse and the one who reverts from Islam (apostate) and leaves the Muslims."³⁴

As mentioned countless other times throughout this thesis it is foolish to read any text without considering the historical implications surrounding said verse or chapter. The Qur'an as well as other texts, such as the Sunnah and the hadith within it, are no exception to this rule given the relationship that history has with the actual writing of most of these texts. In order to understand the logic behind the verses and way in which sentences are written, one must first adopt a quasi "archaic" mindset to understand how it would have been understood during the time period it was written which will provide a clearer image as to whether or not the *tafsir* should be read in a descriptive or prescriptive lens. In this particular instance, if these statements were read at face value, it would be simple to extrapolate a meaning that would justify any argument stating Muslims are commanded to kill or enact violence against those who choose to leave the religion. Unsurprisingly, this oversimplistic interpretation is incorrect because it fails to address the historical context surrounding the statements.

With the cultural implications as well as societal ramifications of apostasy taken into consideration whilst reviewing this statement it becomes evident as to why this particular wording was used in explaining the consequences of leaving Islam. During the formative years of the faith Muhammad had only a few main objectives: one, spread the word of Allah and ultimately deliver Arabia from the *jahil* culture that plagued it, two, ward off any people group that attempted to persecute the early Muslims, and three, ensure the survival of Islam. This statement is an attempt to maintain the order within the Muslim ranks in order to hinder the

³⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari 687 : Book 87, Hadith 17

growth of enemies yet promote the expansion of Islam as a result. With every person that dissented from the ranks and joined another people group, possibly the enemies that persecuted Muslims, the chances of Islam's survival dwindled. Everything at this point was about preserving the newly formed religion in the midst of chaos, and Muhammad recognized that dissension of any kind could prove to be detrimental to Islam. The Medieval theologian and Muslim scholar Imam Ibn Al Humam argues the same point in stating,

“The reason to kill an apostate is only with the intent to eliminate the danger of war, and not for the reason of his disbelief. The punishment of disbelief is far greater with God. Therefore, only such an apostate shall be killed who is actively engaged in war; and usually it is a man, and not a woman. For the same reason, the Holy Prophet has forbidden to kill women. And for this very reason, an apostate female could be killed if she in fact instigates and causes war by her influence and armed force at her disposal. She is not killed because of her apostasy, but for her creating disorder (through war) on earth.³⁵

This rendering from Al Humam clarifies the murkiness of this statement because, at face value, it seems to justify the hatred and killing of Muslims turned *muhajirin* contradicting all verses in the Qur'an arguing the fair treatment of non-Muslims. This statement is in no way a command or even tacit approval of Muslims going out of their way to execute all of those who choose to turn away from the faith. Instead, it should be read in a descriptive manner with the cultural implications at the time being taken into consideration. Some extremist groups have chosen to use this verse as a justification for murdering anyone who strays away from the often times puritanical as well as contorted version of Islam they are peddling. This is another example of bad Islam being the result of a poor understanding of historical context or the cultural mindset of the time period.

³⁵ Imam Ibn Al Humam

As stated in the previous section discussing the way in which the Qur'an itself can be misconstrued without a proper knowledge of the historical background attached to it, the Sunnah carries the same ramifications for extrapolating a correct interpretation. The recurring motif of the marriage between history and the text seems to be the answer to the question of whether or not Islam is a religion of peace. All evidence thus far has led to this as any verse or statement within the Qur'an or Sunnah can be warped from its intended meaning without the appropriate knowledge attached to a specific verse.

8.3. Sharia Law and Peace

Sharia or Islamic law is the overarching religious law that Muslims are required to live by. This law is an amalgamation of teachings within the Qur'an which is recognized as the ultimate source of Allah's will, the Sunnah and the specific credible hadiths within it, the *qiyas* or analogical reasonings, and the *ijma* which is simply a judicial consensus. The concept of *Sharia* can be equated to the theological principles developed by early church fathers in Christianity attempting to formulate a consensus on the basic belief systems all Christians should hold as true. In the context of Islam, the Qur'an is the word, the Sunnah is the context, and *sharia* is the application. Similarly to the classifications within the Sunnah there are classifications within *sharia* dictating what is and what is not permissible for Muslims. The classes of rulings and law within this fixture of Islam are as follows: : mandatory (*farḍ* or *wājib*), recommended (*mandūb* or *mustaḥabb*), neutral (*mubāḥ*), reprehensible (*makrūh*), and forbidden (*ḥarām*). These classifications are utilised by Muslims to judge what is pleasing to Allah as inaction in the *farḍ* category is displeasing as is acting in the *haram* category. The aim of *sharia* law is defined by the principle of *maṣlaḥa* meaning “welfare” or “public interest” which most

classical Islamic scholars define as being the preservation of “religion, life, intellect, offspring, and property”. Later scholars have adapted this approach and have argued that the concepts of women’s rights, human rights, and justice as well as personal freedoms are also included in the overarching goal of sharia as the texts from which *sharia* is derived are timeless whereas application is ever changing. This is not to argue that scholars arguing the latter opinion are scrapping the literal meaning of texts used in order to formulate *shariah* law. There is simply a viewpoint being used which acknowledges that most laws immediately following the life of Muhammad were context dependent, and historical context of the way in which they were applied is quite different from the ways in which they can be followed in a contemporary sense.

This being said, there are factions within the Muslim community that have incorrectly implemented forms of *shariah* law as it is dependent on correct interpretations of the Qur’an and Sunnah respectively. In a contemporary sense, most Muslim majority nations have stylized *sharia* and made it a part of their legal framework in some form or fashion. Obviously there are different variances and situations in which Islamic law is implemented depending on a nation’s cultural heritage or susceptibility to extremism, but there are ways in which certain nation’s have included *sharia* in their legal code. The influence that *sharia* holds in most Muslim majority nations is only applied to civil cases and disputes such as marriage, divorce, domestic violence, inheritance, family law, and other fields. In other nations there is an interpretation of *sharia* law used to justify injustice. At this point it would be fair to address the fact that *sharia*, being based off of interpretations of the Qur’an as well as the Sunnah, can be skewed because of incorrect interpretations. It is simply meant to be the writings of these texts put into practice, and when those interpretations are incorrect or are attempting to justify a specific agenda the application is

obviously faulty. Despite this, it would be imprudent to not address these applications in order to explain why they are incorrect and not representative of Islam, and this section will do so by combing through some of the mysticism surrounding *sharia*.

Throughout this thesis, the avenue utilized to determine whether or not Islam is a religion of peace has been to provide verses that are often interpreted as a justification for violence while providing historical evidence disproving these opinions. Because *sharia* law is dependent upon correct interpretations of the text it makes sense for me to address the correct interpretations of the chief Islamic texts in the hopes that the answer to how *sharia* should be interpreted will reveal itself. This thesis has addressed peace between Muslims as well as the way in which Muslims are called to interact with the *muhajirin*. In these two categories of life, it seems as though the majority of *sharia* texts that are correct interpretations and not a product of some greater political influence should align with the aforementioned thoughts on how Muslims are called to address peace in the classical sense. The “classical sense” of course is addressing the role peace and violence play in regards to warfare and addressing any sort of physical opposition.

The next portion of the thesis is somewhat an unorthodox take on how peace is implemented in all facets of Muslim life as the history of Islamic art will be discussed. At face value it may seem as though art and peace have no connection, but this thesis will argue otherwise as a society that is peaceful is able to create and expand its influence artistically which ultimately promotes growth of a culture and not the degradation of society as the antithesis would suggest.

9. Islamic Art and Peace

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the ultimate goal of Islam, as Muhammad suggested throughout his life, was originally to eliminate the backwards culture that plagued the Arabian peninsula at the time as it promoted tribalism, barbaric practices, paganism, and ultimately the degradation of Arab culture as a whole. Following the conquest of Mecca and the death of Muhammad, Islam began to gain traction in the Arabian peninsula as a dominating cultural force as it spread militarily and brought practices influenced by the new religion along with it that were integrated into the societies that it had melded with. One of the most profound aspects of culture that Islam influenced was art as the religious dogma and traditions associated with Islam began to mesh with the already present Arab culture ultimately being a catalyst in the transition from the term “Arab world” to “Muslim world”. To readdress a point already made earlier in this thesis, the reason that the influence and evolution of art in the Muslim world is being analyzed is because art is a very easy way to track a society’s growth as a society that is promoting the creation of art is promoting the growth of society. The promotion of the growth within a society can thus be attributed to the desire to preserve a cultural heritage in times of goodwill and peace. The ratio of art created when a society is in a peaceful time period outnumbers art created during times of warfare or tribulation at a staggering rate. In some cases throughout history, art has been destroyed as a way of disintegrating the cultural legacy of a people group. A contemporary example of this would be how ISIS destroys art in the hopes of destroying any culture that they deem as “blasphemous” or inconsistent with the “will of Allah”. This is simply another example

of how these groups are not promoting peace or practicing “true Islam” as they attempt to destroy the works created during times of peace in order to establish their warped interpretations of Islam.

One of the most recognizable signs of Islamic art is the usage of calligraphy as a means of depicting either a story or image to whomever is admiring the art piece. Despite a common western misinterpretation that argues that it is *haram* for Muslims to draw illustrations as this is synonymous with idolatry, Muhammad actually never said that there could be no drawing of human figures. He simply warned his followers that if they did do so they would have to be cautious not to make these illustrations synonymous with Allah or equate them to some sort of iconography as was seen in Arab tribes prior to the introduction of Islam into the region. *Ayats* from the Qur'an are often times used in Islamic art as a means of paying homage to the holy texts that established Islam in a world that was apprehensive to its creation as history shows, and in the beginnings of Islam following the death of Muhammad Quranic design was the chief way in which artists expressed the cultural expansion of Islam. During the *Abbasid caliphate*, Islam influenced cultural change and emergence that was reflected in the art and different ways in which the Qur'an was stylized by different artists in modern-day Iraq and Iran. As the Qur'an was adapted throughout the Muslim world the calligraphy often times associated with Quranic texts was also used on items such as rugs, vases, plates, and other items as a “gesture toward the divine”³⁶, and by the end of the tenth century Islamic art had established itself as a unique art form representative of advancement within the Muslim world.

³⁶ Weinstein, L., & Fetvacı, E. (2015). *Ink, silk & gold: Islamic art from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. Boston: MFA Publ.

During the eleventh century, areas at the edge of the Muslim world, specifically North African territories, began to break away and gain independence. However, many of them remained constant with the cultural as well as religious influences of Islam. Similarly to what was seen in the earlier stages of Islam, art played a role in the daily life of Muslims as they used it as a means of preserving and tracking the influence of the Qur'an throughout the Arabian peninsula, Africa, Asia, and Europe. An important note is that the term "Islamic art" was not coined until European explorers began to engage with the Muslim world in the early 19th century, and does not simply encompass art in the traditional or religious sense, but all art forms created in the Muslim world. This broad definition makes the study of Islamic art somewhat cumbersome as it does encompass so many different art forms that span across so many territories. Nonetheless, this thesis is attempting to analyze the cultural influence of Islam had on art as it does showcase the reach and advancement of a particular society.

Islamic art is not centralized to Arab culture. In fact, the majority of these art forms that have been discussed are consistent with whatever culture they were present. For example, a Quranic adaptation in Saudi Arabia is vastly different than a Quranic artistic interpretation in Egypt as Islam implanted itself in whatever culture accepted it and made it a fixture in its society without stamping out the heritage. Another example of Islam promoting the melding of cultures is the Taj Mahal which is found in Agra, India as the architecture of the structure bridges the gap between South Asian culture and the religious heritage of Islam. A culture that is warring or one that does not promote peace would not coalesce with another nor would it have the desire to create structures such as this. This is yet another example of how while Islam had a vast territorial influence ultimately is a religion that promotes tolerance as it did during the *Dastur*

al-Madinah because of the trend of blending with the culture that had accepted it. A religion that was promoted violence would neither feel the need to blend with the cultures that it influences nor create art that reflects the amalgamation of the symbolic joining of the two.

All of the art produced during prior to the 19th century was essentially the creation of art in the “heyday” of Islam as this was a time of cultural expansion and growth of society. The promotion of the arts leading up to this point made the Muslim world a beacon of intellectual as well as artistic influence in the world. However, the introduction of colonialism as well as the shift to war in defense of the Islamic faith halted this influence and ultimately has made the Muslim world an example of regressive progress as very little art is being created currently and there is a culture of factionalism plaguing so much of the Muslim world. This brief historical overview of Islamic art and the promotion of the arts in Muslim dominated countries illustrates the relationship between art and peace as a society that is at war has no time to encourage the artistic documentation of their culture. In some cases the creation of art is halted while in others it is destroyed. The goal of this thesis is to address whether or not Islam is peaceful at its core, and analyzing the influence of art throughout Islamic history affirms that at its core it is a religion of peace as much of the art was created closer to the founding of the religion-- leading one to believe that the closer to the founding of Islam the more peaceful society was.

10. Women in Islam

As addressed in the previous section of this thesis, the concept of peace is not exclusive to war in the literal sense. As the bifurcated Islamic of principle suggests, peace is much more than the physical battles that one may fight, but in fact encompasses every aspect of a person’s life. The way in which women are currently treated in some areas of the Muslim world is

critiqued as being representative of how Islam as a whole addresses their treatment. This equivocation is a dangerous one to make, and this section will first begin by addressing the fallacy often made in regards to the treatment of women within the Muslim world. In a 2014 CNN interview, professor Reza Aslan addressed this classical equivocation fallacy by arguing that to equating the treatment of women in one area of the Muslim world as a means of justifying the belief that Islam as a whole justifies certain behavior is, as he stated, “a stupid argument”.

The example of female genital mutilation is the first anecdote he used as a means of defending his point. At the time female genital mutilation in certain Muslim majority nations was a topic that was at the center of the “Islam promotes violence” discussion, and professor Aslan argued that this barbaric practice was in no way indicative of the way in which Islam says to treat women as it was, and still is, isolated to African nations. His point being that this practice was indicative to the way in which this nation has decided to incorrectly apply sharia law in the hopes of creating a puritanical society, and is an isolated event. Eritrea and Ethiopia, both Christian nations, have extremely high rates of female genital mutilation yet their practices are not equated to being a part of Christian dogma. To further his point that certain practices, in regards to the treatment of women in some Muslim majority nations, are strictly cultural and not reflective of Islam as a whole he pointed out the contrarian realities of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Indonesia. All of these nations are Muslim majority nations yet the treatment of women in the first two is extremely different from the last two as Saudi Arabia as well as Iran have implemented a strict and militant *sharia* law that strips women of their basic rights of bodily autonomy and freedom whereas in the last two women have virtually all of the same rights as men.

It is important to separate the cultural practices and adaptation of Islamic law in a particular nation from the entirety of Islam as this can lead to a warped view of what Islam requires in regards to treatment of women. The goal of this thesis is to analyze the dogma of Islam in its nascent and most pure form as to acquire the true ways in which these issues should be interpreted. Equivocating Islam to the possible incorrect interpretations within certain countries that are fueled by political gain is a dangerous way in which to approach this section (or any topic within Islam) as it provides a bias that is not entirely accurate. The following section will analyze the treatment of women in Muhammad's life and the legacy he left as a guide in the treatment of women to see if Islam is truly peaceful in all possible aspects of life. It needs to be made clear that barbaric practices that some Muslims may partake in are not inherently Islamic nor are they *sharia* which is often the line drawn.

10.1. Islam as Feminist Religion

The discussion of whether or not Islam is a feminist religion is much contested both within and outside of the Muslim community as some women who have adopted the title of “Muslim feminists” argue that Islam can be interpreted as a religion that promotes the furthering of women’s rights, while critics of Islam argue that Islam is a religion promoting the mistreatment of women and oppression in some respects. This section will address both viewpoints in light of the historical context behind the treatment of women during Muhammad’s lifetime in the hopes of answering this question.

Islamic feminists regard the text in a feminist lense as the name of their newly formed faction suggests and argue that Islam and the concept of “feminism” in the contemporary interpretation are not mutually exclusive. They argue that in order to correctly interpret Islam

women must first reclaim the religion which has been hijacked by men attempting to subjugate women as seen around the world in other faith traditions. This is based on the premise that The Bible or The Torah could be read and interpreted as a way of perpetuating a sexist dogma, but at the root of these religions they call for the equality for women. In a 2015 Ted Talk, Alaa Murabit addresses the way in which women are meant to be treated in Islam, arguing that there must be a reclaiming of the faith by women to thwart any interpretation of the Qur'an stating that men and women are on a different plane of equality in the eyes of Allah and thus translating into the dynamic that should be had in society. The concepts of *haram* (religiously prohibited) and *aib* (culturally restricted) are both analyzed in her presentation as she provides an anecdote explaining the dynamic between religiously forbidden and culturally inappropriate actions respectively. Thus, making it quite clear that the religious regulations within the Qur'an may not necessarily align with the cultural implications within a society, or may be misconstrued to equate the two. When regarding the history of Islam, she points out the influence that women had in the formation of the religion in its nascent years, and contrasts these women with the way in which women were treated in Arab culture prior to the introduction of Islam. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the goal of Islam was to eliminate the *jahil* way of living in the Arabian peninsula before Islam was introduced into the society as it was a barbaric culture in practice. She asks why men in modern Islam have decided to create cultural barriers relegating women to a position in society comparable to the *jahil* period in the Arabian peninsula by using "bad Islam" and quite literally reestablishing one facet of Arab culture Muhammad attempted to eradicate. It must be understood that for the culture and time in which Islam was introduced it was a radical shift from how women had been traditionally treated as Muslim women were able

to own property during Muhammad's time, were able to obtain positions of political, economic, and even military power, and were not subject to changing their names as a symbol of not being their husband's property. Muhammad's contemporaries would have seen him as a radical in regards to how he treated women during the seventh century, and Murabit argues that modern Muslims who subject women to barbaric and oppressive cultural practices are essentially going against Muhammad's intentions.

The history of women in Islam can be traced back to the first female follower of Muhammad-- his wife, *Khadija bint Khuwaylid* who financed the Islamic faith in its infancy and ultimately was an influential force in the growth of the faith prior to her death. She is recognized by most Muslims as being the "mother of Islam" and because of her work in the formative years of the faith the religion was able to spread the way in which it did. She was a valued advisor to Muhammad despite her being a woman and some hadiths suggest her critique of his word choice once in regards to women. She of course did not take his last name for the aforementioned reasoning that she was not his property nor were any other Muslim women to their husbands, and as the first female in the faith she can be cited as being a powerful force in the faith's beginnings. Islamic feminists argue that the reclaiming of the faith means reclaiming the doctrines of the religion from men as they do control the message (similarly to every other world religion), but that in practice Islam calls for the equality of men and women. Hadiths such as "the best of you is the best to your family"³⁷ and "do not let your brother oppress another"³⁸ are examples of how at its core Islam does call for the fair treatment of women in all aspects of life.

³⁷ Ibn Majah and authenticated by Al-Albani

³⁸ Ibid.

Often times, critics of Islam cite the wearing of *hijabs* and other body coverings as a justification to argue that Islam is a religion that oppresses women in their decision of what to wear or how to behave in society. This is an incorrect view as to the role that these body coverings play in Islam as they are actually a choice made by the woman. This is not to say that Islam in no way promotes modesty in society because it actively does promote this type of lifestyle. However, it is important to note that Muhammad actually made the suggestion, in accordance with the goals of modesty in the Qur'an to women in his camp as a means of protecting them from the sexual desires of men. His argument was that woman could cover what had the potential to make men commit *haram* in order to protect themselves as well as encourage men to remain faithful to their pledges against premarital sex, rape culture, lust, etc. Some countries have established legal precedents requiring women to wear body coverings which is in itself a form of oppression, but this is not what Muhammad meant whenever he referenced hijabs and covering one's body.

Those that also suggest Islam is a religion that promotes an oppressive state for women argue that the Qur'an and Hadith make it evident that men and women have different roles in society as mandated by Allah and thus have varying levels of importance in the eyes of Allah and ultimately society. This viewpoints the ayat stating, "And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women"³⁹, making it evident that both men and women have the same spiritual duty and value in the eyes of Allah. As Murabit addressed in her Ted Talk, it makes no sense why the Qur'an stresses the equality of man and woman on a spiritual level but in some Muslim majority nations women are subjugated to existing in a culture that goes out of

³⁹ The Holy Qur'an, Surah Baqarah 2:228

its way to be oppressive. This oppression can be systemic or in some cases physical as there is an ayat within the Qur'an which seem to justify the striking or beating of women.

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).”⁴⁰

There are many dissenting opinions on this verse as the majority of credible Muslim scholars and jurists either have no explanation for this *ayat* or simply argue that it is not representative of how Muhammad treated women as there are many hadiths where he calls for women to not be harmed in any way. Some scholars, however, argue that Muslim men are able to act in *idribuhunna* meaning a light force as a means of correction. This being said, in a few Muslim majority nations domestic violence is not condemned as it is a part of the aforementioned *aib* within society justified by the religious texts in Islam.

Following the example of Muhammad in the Sunnah, Islam's goal of eradicating *jahil* from society, and syllogistic reasoning by using text within the Qur'an and Sunnah seems to make it quite difficult to justify any sort of oppression over any person-- namely Muslim women. Muhammad's message seems to be a call for peace in all aspects of the word, especially the way in which one treats others, as he asserted that overall Muslims are not called to be vindictive or oppressive in their actions as some critics of the religion suggests. As Alaa Murabit asserted in her Ted Talk, it does not make sense for Islam to be the deliverer of Arab culture out of the *jihad*

⁴⁰ The Holy Qur'an, Surah Nisa 4:34

mindset only to return to the regressive way in which women were treated in that time period. Furthermore, there is no reason for Islam to justify the mistreatment of women who are Muslim when Muhammad went out of his way to ensure fair treatment of *al muhajirin* and women who themselves were non-Muslims as the Sunnah indicates.

11. Islam and Pacifism

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, it would be scholarly irresponsible for one to deny the martial history that made up much of Islam's formative years while early Muslims were being persecuted and sent into exile. This portion of Islam's history is vital in understanding the overarching framework of the Muslim faith as well as an argument being made in this thesis-- that Islam is a religion with the goal of peace, but will take up arms as a last resort when a situation seems to necessitate it. Islam's history with warfare and the very real martial aspect of *jihad* also makes it difficult for one to argue that it is a pacifist religion which, by definition, would constitute a completely non-violent approach to life. Pacifism is defined as "the belief that any violence, including war, is unjustifiable under any circumstances, and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means"⁴¹, and while the overarching goal of Islam in its founding was to achieve peace and societal fidelity in the Arabian peninsula in order to eliminate the *jahil* mindset previously mentioned in this thesis, it would be quite difficult to ignore the history as well as theological beliefs of Islam condemn violence in all aspects of life. On the other hand, it would be fair to argue that Islam is a religion to promote peace given the origins of its founding, the overarching theme of the holy texts which is to correct a broken society, and the life lived by The Prophet Muhammad as he instructed his followers to live lives of peace as well as goodwill to all of their neighbors. Pacifist and peaceful are not synonymous as it is often times thought of, but instead the two are both valid takes on what it takes for one to

⁴¹ *DK illustrated Oxford dictionary*. (2003). London: Dorling Kindersley.

live a peaceful life in the society of today. Pure pacifism does not seem to be a realistic approach to living one's life, and Muhammad's followers are not out of line for not subscribing to that mindset given the condition of the world.

12. The Christian Perspective on Peace in Society

12.1. The New Testament and Peace

Similarly to Islam, Christianity acted as a cultural emollient that criticized the already established hubris and tradition within Jewish culture as well as the debaucherous culture plaguing Rome at the time. Jesus throughout his life was an example of a person living a life that was of peace as he is the primary example of how a Christian should lead their life in the eyes of God (YHWH). Throughout the New Testament, the Greek word for peace, “*eirene*”, is used in referenced to meaning “rest” and “tranquility” which in both contexts are is used in describing the way in which followers of Christ are called to live, the ultimate goal that Christianity has for the world, and the way Christians are supposed to regard their relationship with God (YHWH). Some biblical scholars have also pointed out, through further research of the texts and linguistic underpinnings, that the concept of peace is utilised in five ways throughout the New Testament: “(1) the absence of war and chaos; (2) peace as a right relationship with God or with Christ; (3) peace as a good relationship among people; (4) peace as an individual or peace in state; (5) peace as a part of a greeting formula.”⁴² In the Old Testament of the Bible, specifically the Tanach, the word used as the identifier of peace is “*shalom*” which is defined as entering a state of wholeness or completion meant through a trusting in God's (YHWH) word. However, the way in

⁴² Arichae, D. C., Jr. (1987). Peace in the New Testament. *Practical Papers for the Bible Translator*, 38(No. 2), 201. Retrieved May 14, 2018.

which peace is utilized in the Bible shifts to encompass more than an understanding and application of the word of God (YHWH) as Jesus not only takes into account the peace one can have on earth, but the peace one has on a spiritual level with the creator. The interpersonal relationship that Jesus incorporated into the framework of peace was monumental for first century Jews who would later follow his teachings as it bridged the gap between a seemingly intimate and personal concept, peace, and a seemingly impersonal God (YHWH). There seems to be a clear distinction between the two ways peace is implemented in a biblical context. The Old Testament describes peace being a state of being that all people will have who follow the word of God (YHWH) as seen in verses such as “Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble”⁴³ and “Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly”⁴⁴. Thus, making it evident that in order to achieve one’s life, one must follow the word of God (YHWH) which is not an untrue theological principle, but Jesus bridged the gap with his teachings which argued that there must be a following of God’s (YHWH) word coupled with one striving to build a personal relationship with said god. In Christian theology, the understanding and striving to achieve this relationship with the creator should be the goal for all people as living a peaceful life in the classical sense is not simply having a physical and mental peace, but also a spiritual peace.

It is important to note that living a peaceful life in all aspects of the word is a central tenet in Christianity as Jesus, being the chief example to Christians on how to live life, lived in a peaceful mindset throughout his life. This can be seen in both his actions and his words within the Bible that ultimately reflect the way in which Christians as a whole are called to lead

⁴³ Psalm 119:165

⁴⁴ Psalm 85:8

peaceful lives. One of the most profound ways in which Jesus demonstrated both a spiritual and a physical representation peace occurred right before his arrest when Peter, one of his apostles, took a sword and cut the ear off of the high priest's servant named Malchus. It is recorded that after this incident Jesus said, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"⁴⁵ after which Jesus performed the miracle of reattaching his ear. This is evidence of the two aspects within Jesus' character. The first being the aforementioned physical or outward peace as explained in previous sections of this thesis outlining Jesus' apprehension to physical violence or malice towards others. The second aspect being edified in this anecdote is the spiritual obedience and peace Jesus is clearly making with God(YHWH) in his statement of following God's (YHWH) plan for him no matter the result because he understands that God (YHWH) has his best interest as well as the interests of humanity as a whole in mind.

The tenet of peace transcended into the framework of the onus Christians are called to take on in living a "Christ-like" life, and is edified in the way in which the first century Christians were instructed to function as a whole. An example of this functionality can be seen in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts who were members of the early Christian church community in Jerusalem. In this story, which seems to be parabolic, the couple sold a portion of their land following the footsteps of Barnabas, but hid some of the funds from their transaction. When confronted about their hiding of the funds by Peter Ananias responded with a lie saying that all of the money had been given to the Church, and as a result he died on the spot. The same situation occurred with Sapphira when she was confronted by Peter a second time to which she responded with a lie and met the same fate as her husband. In the grand scheme of

⁴⁵ John 18:11

things Peter addressed the fact that they not only lied to man, but also to God (YHWH) by withholding from the Church. This is evidentiary that after Jesus had imparted his message to his followers the concept of making peace with God (YHWH) was not forgotten alongside the making peace with man. Ananias and Sapphira both lying was a transgression against God (YHWH) for which they paid the price that he saw fit.

While this is only a brief analysis of the concept of peace in the New Testament as well as its influence on the first century church it addresses the main theological tenet of peace as dictated in Christian dogma. The “tenet” of course being represented in the way that Jesus led his life through his teaching and his actions leading up until his death on the cross in 35 AD. Nonetheless, it is difficult for anyone to argue that peace is not a central fixture of the Christian faith as the New Testament and the life of Jesus are used as chief examples of how a modern Christian should lead a life that is fulfilling in the eyes of God (YHWH).

13. Christian Art and Peace

Throughout the cultural and formative history of Christianity there has been an active presence of art. Works from the Medieval period as well as the Renaissance period in Europe are arguably the most well known art pieces which heavily influenced by Christian theology and artists. Similarly to Islam, the history of Christian art in the world following the introduction of Christianity into the modern world was heavily influenced by the periods of peace and good will in the regions of the world that they were created.

During the medieval period in Europe, which was heavily influenced by campaigns as well as expansionism in the early Christian church art can be viewed today as depicting the growth of the Christian church. Art, as aforementioned, is generally created when a culture or

society witnesses growth in its influence and experiences some sort of victory in its conquests to grow. As Christianity expanded throughout Europe, art became a prominent mode of expression in the modern world as a mode of representation for the time period, and the as Christian thought gained traction (even through conquest) art began to emerge as a chief tool for preserving the cultural history at the time. A large majority of the paintings and pieces of art depicting Christian influence and expansion throughout Europe is seen after the late 500s. This is because prior to art being a way in which Christians expressed their history and growth was dulled and not widespread as Christians were being heavily persecuted. After the 4th century, the Christian faith began to gain a sizeable following and thus began to incorporate architecture into the framework of Christian expression of history. Large cathedrals and basilicas, many of which are still in good health today, became a physical representation of the Christian church and were ornate in structure as well as grandior as they were built in order to establish the presence of God (YHWH) on earth. Also in this time period, the introduction of ostentatious stone masonry as well as gold castings became prominent modes for artists as well as the church as a whole to express the visual history of Christianity as artists and masons were encouraged by the church to depict the rich cultural history of Christianity in the grandest way possible.

The Renaissance period is considered the height of human artistic exploration as well as the pinnacle of the Christian church's influence in Europe. As a result, works such as "*The Last Supper*" painted by Leonardo Da Vinci became well-known representations of the history as well as cultural influence Christianity had on the world as it became almost instantly famous and recognizable by anyone educated in art. In fact, this along with other works of art such as "*The Madonna of the Pomegranate*" by Sandro Botticelli, "*The Wedding of Cana*" by Paolo

Veronese, and “*The Creation of Adam*” by Raphael are still considered representative of the history and impact Christianity had on art as artists transitioned into realistic representations of man not seen prior to the Renaissance. Needless to say, the introduction of Christianity into Europe, even after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, had a sizeable effect on art in this region, and is representative of the periods of peace and growth in Christian society as artists were commissioned to represent the theological as well as historical underpinnings of the faith.

Other periods in Christian history, such as the Protestant Reformation, were heavily influenced by Christian thought and the growth of society as people began to innovate and incorporate new mediums in their art forms to represent the Christian church history. It is evident, as is with the growth of Islam, that periods of peace connote cultural expansion and the desire to create. This is in no way denying the martial aspects of Christian history, but instead addresses the reality that like any other faith, when culture growth is promoted art is created when times are relatively peaceful.

14. Women in Christianity

The New Testament has the potential to be read as a text that promotes an equal treatment of women in the Christian faith. As previously mentioned, Christianity, at the time of its founding, was somewhat radical and reformative in the way in which women were called to be treated in the eyes of God (YHWH). Jesus, who is recognized as being the example in which Christians are meant to treat one another went out of his way multiple times to address the inherent sexism in Jewish culture at the time. The example of Jesus and the woman going to be stoned for alleged adultery is an example of Jesus’ addressal of both the hypocrisy in the systems leading Jewish culture (i.e. the Pharisees and Sadducees) as well as the sexism attached with the

accusals of the woman in the situation of adultery. His representation of the woman in a time that generally would have resulted in her condemnation, chastisement, and death in Jewish culture is evidence that: 1) Jesus recognized the hypocritical nature of the condemnation, 2) Jesus actively fought against the blame being placed on the woman for an alleged crime, and 3) Jesus addressed the justice that had been lost in her not seeming to have been put on trial and allowed to defend herself in a court.

Another example of Jesus' commitment to including women and outcasts of society in the framework of Christianity, as Jewish culture at the time seemed to either subjugate women to a subclass of human or disregard them entirely, was his commitment to including women in his ministry. As briefly mentioned prior to this section in the thesis, Mary Magdalene became a leading disciple and walking example of Jesus' fair treatment of women in God's eyes. Not only was she very close to Jesus during his life, but it could be argued that he did not appear to her following his resurrection first (as opposed to any other disciple who was a male) on accident. He seems to recognize her unyielding faith as well as her position as an equal in God's (YHWH) eyes in the literal sense as Christian theology dictates that he was the physical manifestation of God (YHWH) on earth. The fact that Mary, as well as other women, were even allowed to maintain direct access with Jesus as a trusted disciple was revolutionary in thought and practice. It is important to note that while this section does argue the equality of man and woman in the eyes of God (YHWH) it does not argue the equal weight burden or responsibility in the Church of men and women. Sexism is not merely the different assignment or treatment of a person, but is instead the unequal representation or treatment of a person because of their gender. It could be argued that Jesus, attempting to eradicate the hypocritical and inherently sexist practices of the

politically elite in regards to women, did establish context to lead one to believe that in the eyes of God (YHWH) all people are spiritually equal but with different roles in the Church as well as in society as a whole.

Catholic scholar and Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious dialogue at Temple University, Leonard Swidler, makes the following points addressing the way in which women were treated in Jewish culture at the time versus how Jesus actively addressed such practices:

“For whatever Jesus said or did comes to us only through the lens of the first Christians. If there were no very special religious significance in a particular concept or custom, we would expect that current concept or custom to be reflected by Jesus. The fact that the overwhelmingly negative attitude toward women in Palestine did not come through the primitive Christian communal lens by itself underscores the clearly great religious importance Jesus attached to his positive attitude--his feminist attitude--toward women: feminism, that is, personalism extended to women, is a constitutive part of the Gospel, the Good News, of Jesus.”⁴⁶

In this statement, Swidler makes it evident that the Gospels, being the actual lense through which first century practitioners of Jesus’ teachings viewed the world fail to point out any moments when Jesus was unjust or sexist towards women. In fact, Jesus’ practices towards women seem to mirror those that denounce any form of sexism in society as outlined in the Gospels. Thus, leading the consensus on Jesus’ treatment of women, and furthermore the way in which Christians are called to treat one another, with an equal law and viewpoint as God (YHWH) would do. It would be difficult to argue that Jesus in any way called for oppression of any kind in regards to women given the evidence provided from his life and teachings in the Gospels. The treatment of women and men equally in the eyes of God (YHWH) is a central

⁴⁶ Swidler, L. (n.d.). Jesus Was a Feminist. Retrieved May 14, 2018, from <https://www.godswordtowomen.org/feminist.htm>

theme in Christianity as Jesus called for the love of all people ultimately leading one to believe that Christianity at its core is a religion that promotes peace through its teachings and Jesus' actions in regards to gender equality in society.

15. Christianity and War Historically

As evident throughout the entirety of this thesis it is clear that it is incorrect to argue that any group is one that is peaceful at its core without addressing the martial aspects and realities within its history. Unlike Islam, which ultimately does have a peaceful agenda, it seems difficult to argue that Christianity condones violence in any form no matter the situation. Jesus does not give any indication within the Gospels as to what instances are acceptable reasons to engaging in violence. In fact, all of his teachings and actions throughout his life indicate the opposite. Thus leading one to believe, that a true practitioner of Christianity would not engage in violence in any situation as Jesus, being the leading example of a Christian walk with God (YHWH), did not engage in violence himself. Despite the example of Jesus, there are obvious lapses in Christian church history when physical violence was a tool used to either spread the Gospel or engage in warfare such as The Crusades and The Spanish Inquisition. Nonetheless there seems to be an overwhelming amount of evidence that Jesus did not support taking up arms which leads one to believe that these moments in history were not reflective of Christianity, but instead reflective of the political climate at the time.

15.1. Christianity and Pacifism

Despite Jesus obviously condemning the taking up of arms against anyone, this does not in any way mean that Jesus did not argue that self-defense is a valid option when one is faced with the reality of being attacked. There are instances where Jesus offered ways to engage in

civil disobedience such as disobeying the Roman rule of making Jews carry their equipment for one mile only. Instead of blatantly disobeying the rule, Jesus argued that his followers should carry the packs more than one mile to get their Roman oppressors in trouble for breaking Roman law. This kind of civil disobedience or passive resistance can be applied to a number of situations. In a sense, Christianity can be classified as pacifist religion because its founder, Jesus, did not seem to condone the physical taking up of arms against another person (much to the dismay of the ancient Jewish thought on the Messiah being a military leader). However, it can not be classified as a purely passive religion as civil disobedience is built into the foundation of the faith's beginnings. Due to these facts, it can be argued that Christianity, at its core, is a religion with a peaceful agenda.

16. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis set out to effectively prove that both Islam and Christianity are religions with a peaceful agenda, however there are different ways in which Muslims and Christians are encouraged to set out and obtain said peace. The reality of Islam is that there is a small martial aspect that cannot be disregarded, but this does not mean that the religion as a whole has a violent agenda. In the same way, Christianity has had a history that makes it susceptible to critics claiming it's allowing of violence to achieve widespread evangelism, but this does not make it a violent religion. Without proper research, these two religions may seem to promote actions that are violent in nature, however when surveying the historical origins of both it becomes clearly evident that violence is not a part of their central dogma.

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