

Jihad in Islam: Is Islam Peaceful or Militant? and An Initial Christian Response

Introduction

In the past months, especially after September 11, 2001, how often you may have read or heard that:

Islam means peace.

Islam is a religion of tolerance. It rejects violence and promotes religious and racial harmony.

The word “jihad” does not mean holy war. Our enemy is fanaticism, not Islam.

Or how often you may have heard or read that

Islam is intolerant, militant, supports terrorism.

The claims differ greatly. Our intention here is to consider these claims, especially on the basis of Islam’s sources, and to provide an initial Christian response to them.

Jihad literally means “to strive”, “to struggle”. Muslims have recognized the following kinds of jihad: 1. The greater jihad: the struggle of the self with evil; the struggle to control the body’s members. 2. The lesser jihad: physical struggle, often associated with fighting and killing. It occurs in the Qur’an most frequently with the meaning of “warfare”, often coupled with “*fi sabil Allah*” (in the way of Allah).¹ Technically, it is war against non-Muslims only, since Muslims are forbidden to fight Muslims.

This statement seeks to focus on jihad as warfare in Islam and, at least, to touch on its significance for the Muslim community throughout the history of Islam. To accomplish this, we turn to Islam’s source materials (which virtually the total Muslim community has recognized as foundational for any serious formulation and understanding of Islam, its beliefs and its practices, including jihad): the *Qur’an* (God’s eternal and inspired Word revealed through Muhammad), the *Hadith* (Muslim Canonical Tradition, the Way of the Prophet Muhammad, who is the recipient of the Qur’an and its primary interpreter) and the *Shari’ah* (Islamic Law as shaped especially by the Qur’an and the Hadith). Jihad as warfare is a pivotal concern for the Qur’an, the Hadith and the Shari’ah.² All Islamic legal schools deal with it.

But before we turn to Islam’s source materials, let us grasp two fundamental assumptions with which traditional Islam has operated throughout its history and which will provide us with an Islamic context for a clearer understanding of jihad’s significance:

¹ Or “on the path of Allah” or “for the cause of Allah”.

² To understand Islam it is imperative that one understands the Shari’ah, Muslim Law. Perhaps nothing so engages the scholars and their differing interpretations of Islam in our rapidly changing world today as the status and interpretation of the Shari’ah and its application for contemporary society. For a detailed exposition of the manifold aspects of jihad see Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1966). He also discusses Shi’ah and Kharaji understandings of jihad.

1. Islam is a total way of life. It knows no separation of church and state, of sacred and secular.
2. Islam condemns all polytheism and idolatry, affirming that God alone is God. It is the culmination of all God's previous revelations (Judaism and Christianity included), it supersedes them and virtually renders them obsolete. Islam is now God's sole revelation and religion for all humanity, Muhammad is God's final prophet and the Qur'an is God's final book. World sovereignty is the sole prerogative of Islam.

Jihad in the Qur'an

Bearing in mind these fundamental assumptions of Islam, we move on to the Qur'an's presentation of jihad as warfare, particularly as it is portrayed in the ministry of Muhammad.

Muhammad's Ministry in Mecca

Generally Muslims have recognized that Muhammad began his ministry among his own people (the Arabs) in and around Mecca in A.D. 610. For thirteen years he faithfully proclaimed that God alone is God. Yet his followers were few and mostly of lower status. With Muhammad they endured opposition, ridicule and even persecution. Still, throughout this period he responded with restraint. In fact, the Qur'an itself documents how he was to respond to rejection and abuse. The following are a few examples:

I (Muhammad) am but a plain warner. (67:2; *passim*)³

We have not sent thee (Muhammad) as a warden over them. (17:54)

So proclaim that which thou art commanded, and withdraw from the idolaters. (15:94; cf. 15:94-99)

And bear with patience what they utter, and part from them with a fair leave taking. (73:10)

...And to be of those who believe and exhort one another to perseverance and exhort one another to pity! (90:17)

Call unto the way of the Lord...and reason with them in a better way.... Grieve not for them and be not in distress because of that which they devise. (16:125-127)

Repel evil with that which is better. (23:96)

All of the above passages are Meccan passages, i.e., passages Muhammad received while he proclaimed Islam in Mecca. As long as he remained in Mecca, he responded to his

³ Quranic quotations are taken from M.M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: The New American Library, n.d.). Pickthall was an English convert to Islam.

enemies peacefully and with restraint. He never responded militantly. What a fine resource of Quranic references to demonstrate that Islam is peaceful, non-violent!

Muhammad's Ministry in Medina

In A.D. 622 Muhammad moved from his home in Mecca to Medina, where Arab tribes had invited him to reside and where they became members of the new Islamic movement. So important is this event in Islamic history – it is called the *hijrah* (“emigration”) – that it actually marks the beginning of the Islamic era.⁴

In Medina Muhammad quickly assumed both religious and political leadership over the whole Medinan community. Soon after he arrived in Medina, he received the first of many Quranic passages (called Medinan passages) which directed him and the Muslim community to fight in the cause of Allah against their enemies. The Qur'an alludes to Muhammad's conflicts with the Arab polytheists throughout Arabia, with the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) and with the hypocrites (Arab polytheists who feigned conversion to Islam: cf. 49:14). The earliest extant Muslim biographies of Muhammad detail Muhammad's military struggles.⁵ It is these conflicts which serve as the seeds for the traditional Islamic divisions of society into 1. the House of Islam and the House of War and 2. the Muslim Community; the People of the Book (Jews and Christians, cf. 9:29,30); the Polytheists (who could become Muslim or accept death or slavery).

The following are a few of the Medinan passages which refer to jihad as military struggle in the Qur'an:

Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged.... (22:39; cf. 22:39-41)⁶

The (true) believers are those only who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere. (49:15; 22:78; 25:52)

Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors.

And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you (there) then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers.

But if they desist, then lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrongdoers.

⁴ Why does the hijrah mark the beginning of the Islamic calendar? Does it help define Islam?

⁵ See especially Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad, A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

⁶ Guillaume, Ishaq's *Sirat* (Biography) *Rasul Allah*, 212,213 identifies these verses as the first verses in the Qur'an to sanction jihad.

The forbidden month for the forbidden month, and forbidden things in retaliation. And one who attacketh you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you. Observe your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who ward off (evil).

Spend your wealth for the cause of Allah.... (2:190-195; cf. 2:216-218; 2:244; 8:38-40; 8:65,66; 4:84; 5:33-35; 61:4)

Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free.... (9:5)

Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.

And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they! (9:29,30)

O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them. Their ultimate abode is hell, a hapless journey's-end. (9:73)

O ye who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty (unto Him). (9:123)

As for Jihad's motivation and benefits:

O ye who believe! Shall I show you a commerce that will save you from a painful doom?

You should believe in Allah and His messenger, and should strive for the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is better for you, if ye did but know.

He will forgive you your sins and bring you into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, and pleasant dwellings in Gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph.

And (He will give you) another blessing which ye love: help from Allah and present victory. Give good tidings (O Muhammad) to believers. (61:10-13; cf. 9:19-22; 9:111; 2:154; 2:243-245; 47:4-6; 3:195)

...Allah hath granted a grade higher to those who strive and fight with their goods and persons than those who sit (at home). (4:95)

From the above Meccan and Medinan verses Muslims have understood that there is a chronological progression in Muhammad's ministry from peaceful proclamation only in Mecca to peaceful proclamation supported, if needed, by the sword in Medina. This was not to suggest that God had changed His mind and that peaceful proclamation of Islam had ceased. It simply meant that when Muhammad entered Medina, initially he was allowed to defend himself against his enemies with the same weapons they used to attack him and eventually was ordered even to fight all idolaters.

The well known Egyptian scholar, Sayyid Qutb, notes four stages in the development of jihad: 1. While the earliest Muslims remained in Mecca before fleeing to Medina, God did not allow them to fight; 2. Permission is given to Muslims to fight against their oppressors; 3. God commands Muslims to fight those fighting them; 4. God commands

the Muslims to fight against all polytheists. He views each stage to be replaced by the next stage in this order, the fourth stage to remain permanent.⁷ To justify the universal and permanent dimensions of jihad he cites the following passages:

They ought to fight in the way of God who have sold the life of this world for the life of the Hereafter; and whoever fights in the way of God and is killed or becomes victorious, to him shall We (God) give a great reward.... (4:74-76)

... and fight them until there is no oppression and the religion is wholly for God.... (8:38-40)

Fight against those among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) who do not believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His messenger have forbidden, until they are subdued and pay *jizyah* (tax on non-Muslims) (9:29-32)

But, as we sometimes hear, does not Islam teach that jihad as physical warfare is solely defensive? True, a few voices in earlier Islamic history and even more voices from the nineteenth century onwards have held this opinion. No doubt, today also many Muslims in the West espouse this opinion, though one might wonder how familiar some of them are with the source materials and history of Islam. Sayyid Qutb, however, pours scorn upon those who view jihad as solely defensive:

... They are ignorant of the nature of Islam and of its function, and that it has a right to take the initiative for human freedom.

Thus wherever an Islamic community exists which is a concrete example of the Divinely-ordained system of life, it has a God-given right to step forward and take control of the political authority so that it may establish the Divine system on earth, while it leaves the matter of belief to individual conscience.⁸

He then cites, during the early advance of Islam, the Muslim response to the Persian general, Rostum, after Rostum enquired why the Muslim leaders had come to Persia with their army:

God has sent us to bring anyone who wishes from servitude to men into the service of God alone, from the narrowness of this world into the vastness of this world and the Hereafter, and from the tyranny of religions into the justice of Islam. God raised a Messenger for this purpose to teach His

⁷ See especially Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, Revised Edition, especially ch. 4, "Jihaad in the Cause of God" (Cedar Rapids: Unity Publishing House, n.d.) 53-76, in which Sayyid Qutb also acknowledges his debt to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. The following Quranic translations are by the author.

⁸ Sayyid Qutb 76; see also 73. His rationale and a resolution to the tension between Islamic world sovereignty and the often cited Qur'an 2:256 ("There is no compulsion in religion"): Only Islamic sovereignty and the Shari'ah can offer the requisite justice that allows all people genuine freedom of conscience and choice. It might well be noted here that Muslims frequently quote Qur'an 2:256 as Islam's declaration of freedom in religion. But how absolute is this freedom? From our discussion on jihad it should be clear how Islam through jihad imposes severe limitations on the freedom of both non-Muslims and Muslims. On the other hand, it should be clarified also that traditional Islam does not limit Jews and Christians to choose either to become Muslim or to fight/die; it also allows them a third choice: to remain what they are (i.e., Jew or Christian) but to come under Islamic rule. Need we add also that Muslim traders and brotherhood movements have also spread Islam peacefully?

creatures His way. If anyone accepts this way of life, we turn back and give his country back to him, and we fight with those who rebel until we are martyred or become victorious.⁹

Likewise the popular Pakistani Muslim revivalist Abu'l Ala Mawdudi rejects any distinction between offensive and defensive jihad. So also the distinguished contemporary Pakistani scholar, Fazlur Rahman, while recognizing the extensive presence of jihad in the Qur'an, rejects

the stand of those modern Muslim apologists who have tried to explain the jihad of the early (Muslim) Community in purely defensive terms.¹⁰

According to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, "the fight is obligatory even when the unbelievers have not started it."¹¹ In the words of Rudolph Peters the "ultimate aim of jihad is 'the subjection of the unbelievers' and 'the extirpation of unbelief'".¹² All of these authorities simply echo Islam's fundamental assumption that world sovereignty must be in the hands of Muslims.

Still, others may ask, is there not a possible conflict in the Qur'an between its peaceful and militant passages? Or, at least, cannot Muslims choose, between the two, which to follow? In fact, the Qur'an itself addresses the problem of change or conflict in general:

Such of Our revelations as We (Allah) abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allah is Able to do all things? (2:106)

And when We put a revelation in place of (another) revelation, – and Allah knoweth best what He revealeth – they say: Lo! thou art but inventing. Most of them know not. (16:101)

On the basis of these verses there arose within the Muslim community the principle of Quranic interpretation, called *naskh* ("abrogation") which stipulated that earlier peaceful verses could be abrogated by later militant verses, i.e., in the case of jihad the Meccan verses were abrogated by the Medinan verses. It is well known that many Muslim scholars in the early history of Islam contended that Qur'an 9:5, sometimes called "the verse of the sword", abrogated a host of peaceful passages in earlier portions of the Qur'an. The nineteenth century Indian Muslim leader, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and a few others have rejected this contention.

Finally we should note here also that at the time of Muhammad's death most of Arabia had submitted to Islamic sovereignty. With logical consistency his earliest successors

⁹ Sayyid Qutb 71.

¹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 37.

¹¹ E. Tyan, "Djihad", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

¹² Rudolph Peters, "Jihad", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987) Vol. 8:88-91. One wonders, in the light of the immediately above cited evidence, how Jamal Badawi, a prominent Canadian Muslim leader, teacher and debater is able to contend that jihad is "permitted only in self-defence or against tyranny and oppression – not as a tool to promote Islam" (*Macleans*, "The Will to Fight and Die," Feb. 11, 1991, 39). Or how Dr. Abdelwahab Boase is able to state "that jihad in the military sense does not have as its object the propagation of religion" (*Arabia* "Distorting the Image of Islam," July, 1986, 78). See also "Jihad in the Shari'ah" and Ibn Khaldun's comments on pages 9, 10 of this essay.

dutifully carried on Islam's expansion beyond the borders of Arabia. Within a century following Muhammad's death Islam had moved westward across North Africa into Europe and eastward as far as present day Pakistan, a military accomplishment that perhaps remains unparalleled up to that time in history. The enterprise itself was in accordance with the Qur'an's direction, implemented by Muhammad in Arabia, initiated beyond Arabia by his faithful caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar, and continued by their successors.¹³ Here is a portion of a poem in praise of Muhammad, his army and jihad, composed by Ka'b b. Malik prior to the siege at Ta'if (in Arabia), about two years prior to Muhammad's death:

Our leader (Muhammad) the prophet, firm,
Pure of heart, steadfast, continent,
Straightforward, full of wisdom, knowledge, and clemency;
Not frivolous nor light minded.
We obey our prophet and we obey a Lord
Who is the Compassionate, most kind to us.
If you offer peace we will accept it
And make you partners in peace and war.
If you refuse we will fight you doggedly,
'Twill be no weak faltering affair.
We shall fight as long as we live
Till you turn to Islam, humbly seeking refuge.
We will fight not caring whom we meet
Whether we destroy ancient holdings or newly gotten gains.
How many tribes assembled against us
Their finest stock and allies!
They came at us thinking they had no equal
And we cut off their noses and ears
With our fine polished Indian swords,
Driving them violently before us
To the command of God and Islam,
Until religion is established, just and straight, and
Al-Lat and al-'Uzza and Wudd are forgotten¹⁴
And we plunder them of their necklaces and earrings.
For they had become established and confident,
And he who cannot protect himself must suffer disgrace.¹⁵

¹³ According to the great Muslim jurist, Shaybani (*Kitab al-Siyar al-Kabir*, 1, 14,15), "Allah gave the Prophet Muhammad four swords (for fighting the unbelievers): the first against polytheists, which Muhammad himself fought with; the second against apostates, which Caliph Abu Bakr fought with; the third against the People of the Book, which Caliph Umar fought with; and the fourth against dissenters, which Caliph Ali fought with" (Majid Khadduri 74). All students of early Islamic history are familiar with the Wars of Apostasy in Arabia, in which Abu Bakr, Muhammad's successor, crushed the Arab tribes who insisted on apostatizing from Islam immediately after the death of Muhammad. It is also well known that when Muslims invite non-Muslims to embrace Islam, they are to warn them that according to the Shari'ah the punishment of apostasy from Islam is death.

¹⁴ Pagan deities in Arabia.

¹⁵ Guillaume 587,588.

Jihad in the Hadith

Islam's Hadith collections too, the second important source of Islam, devote considerable space to jihad. Almost one-third of the fourth of nine volumes of Bukhari, Islam's principal collector of Hadith, focus on jihad as physical war. The following are a few examples:

Narrated Ibn 'Umar: Allah's Apostle said: "I have been ordered (by Allah) to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's Apostle, and offer the prayers perfectly and give the obligatory charity, so if they perform all that, then they save their lives and property from me except for Islamic laws, and then their reckoning (accounts) will be done by Allah."¹⁶

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle was asked, "What is the best deed?" He replied, "To believe in Allah and His Apostle (Muhammad)." The questioner then asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To participate in Jihad (religious fighting) in Allah's cause...."¹⁷

Abu 'Abs reported God's messenger as saying, "No man whose feet become dusty in God's path will be touched by hell." Bukhari transmitted it.¹⁸

Al-Miqdam b. Madikarib reported God's messenger as saying, "The martyr receives six good things from God: he is forgiven at the first shedding of his blood, he is shown his abode in paradise, he is preserved from the punishment in the grave, he is kept safe from the greatest terror, he has placed on his head the crown of honour a ruby which is better than the world and what it contains, he is married to seventy-two wives of the maidens with large dark eyes, and is made intercessor for seventy of his relatives." Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah transmitted it.¹⁹

Jabir b. Samura reported God's messenger as saying, "This religion will not cease to endure with a company of the Muslims fighting on its behalf till the last hour comes." Muslim transmitted it.²⁰

Worth noting here also is the fact that 66 page Introduction to the nine volumes of the widely distributed *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari* contains a 19 page essay "The Call to Jihad (Fighting for Allah's Cause) in the Holy Qur'an" by Sheikh Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Hamid, Sacred Mosque of Mecca. The author writes in his concluding appeal to his readers:

So it is incumbent upon us (Muslims) to follow the path which Allah's Messenger (Muhammad) adopted to avoid polytheism and heresy in all its shapes and to take the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's Traditions as torches in front of us to guide us. We have to teach our brethren and convey the Message to non-Muslims all over the world as much as possible in order to save them from the Hell-fire. We have to prepare ourselves to stand in the face of our enemy and to possess the means of power and to participate in the progress of useful industries in order to protect our religion and be powerful enough to face our enemy, as Allah, the Elevated says in *Surat al-Anfal* (8:60):

¹⁶ *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, Muhammad M. Khan (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1984) Vol. 1: 25,26.

¹⁷ *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 1: 26.

¹⁸ *Mishkat al-Masabih*, trans. by James Robson (Lahore: Ashraf, 1975) Vol. 1: 807.

¹⁹ *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. 1: 814.

²⁰ *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. 1: 808.

And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles and other weapons, etc.) to strike terror into the (hearts of) the Enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others beside, whom you may not know, but whom Allah does know. Whatever you shall spend in the Cause of Allah, shall be repaid to you, and you shall not be treated unjustly.²¹

How many terrorists would appeal to this verse “to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy”?

Jihad in the Shari`ah

From the Qur’an and the Hadith we move to the Shari`ah. The Shari`ah is God’s Law, distinct from all human codes of law. It is God’s indispensable link between Himself and His people (*ummah*), the manifestation of His divine will for Muslims and for those non-Muslim minorities (or majorities) under the domination of the Muslim community. All Muslim schools of Shari`ah acknowledge the presence and importance of jihad as warfare. Since, however, the Shari`ah essentially reflects what its principal sources (Qur’an and Hadith) have pronounced, we limit our quotations from the Shari`ah to the following:

The sacred injunction concerning war is sufficiently observed when it is carried on by any one party or tribe of Mussulmans; and it is then no longer of any force with respect to the rest. It is established as a divine ordinance, by the word of God, who has said, in the Koran, “slay the infidels”, and also by a saying of the prophet, “war is permanently established until the day of judgement,” (meaning the ordinance respecting war)....

The destruction of the sword is incurred by infidels, although they be not the first aggressors, as appears from various passages in the sacred writings which are generally received to this effect.²²

When the Mussulmans enter the enemy’s country, and besiege the cities or strongholds of the infidels, it is necessary to invite them to embrace the faith, because Ibn Abbas relates of the prophet that “he never destroyed any without previously inviting them to embrace the faith.” If, therefore, they embrace the faith, it is unnecessary to war with them, because that which was the design of the war is then obtained without war. The prophet, moreover, has said, “we are directed to make war upon man until such time as they shall confess THERE IS NO GOD BUT ONE GOD; but when they repeat this creed, their persons and properties are in protection.” – If they do not accept the call to the faith, they must then be called upon to pay *Jizyat*, or capitation-tax; because the prophet directed the commander of his armies so to do; and also, because by submitting to this tax, war is forbidden and terminated, upon the authority of the Koran. (This call to pay capitation tax, however, respects only those from whom the capitation tax is acceptable; for as to apostates and the idolaters of Arabia, to call upon them to pay the tax is useless, since nothing is accepted from them but embracing the faith, as it is thus commanded in the Koran.)²³

²¹ *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 1: xxiv-xliii.

²² *The Hedaya, Commentary on the Islamic Laws*, trans. by Charles Hamilton (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1985) Vol. 2:140,141.

²³ *The Hedaya, Commentary on the Islamic Laws*, Vol. 2:143,144. Those who pay the tax *jizya(t)* are the Dhimmis (The People of the Book: Jews and Christians). For their low status under Muslim rule, see “*Dhimma*,” *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Ithica: Cornell University, 1953).

Summary

Numerous Meccan passages from the Qur'an uniformly indicate that while Muhammad resided in Mecca, he preached Islam patiently and peacefully, avoiding physical warfare with his enemy. Probably few would challenge this fact. Given this fact, then, it becomes understandable that some Muslims, claiming that Islam means peace and avoids violence, are able to substantiate their claims with Meccan passages from the Qur'an. So let all, Muslims and non-Muslims, recognize this thirteen year period of peace which endured until the Hijrah.

It is just as clear, however, as Muslims generally have understood, that after the Hijrah Muhammad resorted to the sword in support of his ministry, at first by the permission and later by the command of God. True, a few Muslims in the past, and more at present, have described this warfare as defensive only. On the other hand, all the recognized source materials for jihad have led their traditional Muslim expositors to acknowledge a development of jihad by stages during the ministry of Muhammed, a jihad which is both defensive and offensive, a jihad which the Muslim community is to pursue until the end of time. What it has signified in the past and signifies at present for masses of Muslims is well summarized in a statement by the world renowned Ibn Khaldun (A.D. 1332-1406), Islam's great historian, sociologist and philosopher:

In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the (Muslim) mission and (the obligation to) convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force. Therefore, caliphate and royal authority are united in (Islam), so that the person in charge can devote the available strength to both of them at the same.²⁴

It is also reflected in the Muslim salutation at the tomb of Muhammad:

Peace be upon thee, O Apostle. We witness that thou hast truly delivered the message, that thou hast striven in the way of God until God glorified His religion and perfected it.²⁵

Herein lies the Islamic priority of the peaceful proclamation of God's unity and sovereignty and, if circumstances demand it, the enforcement of the peaceful proclamation through "striving in the way of Allah" upon those who resist the peaceful proclamation.

²⁴ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. by Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958) Vol. 1:473. According to Ibn Khaldun Islam's universality and "obligation to gain power over other nations" distinguishes Islam's jihad from the holy war of other religions. As to the importance of jihad he states: "Although the personal exercise of the office of judge was to have been the task of (the caliphs), they entrusted others with it because they were too busy with general politics and too occupied with the holy war, conquests, defense of the border regions, and protection of the center. These were things which could not be undertaken by anyone else because of their great importance..." (Vol. 1:454). For further observations on jihad, including his assertion that revenge is man's motive for war, see Vol.2:70-73.

²⁵ Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984) 26. A very useful volume, not least for its discussion on jihad. See especially "The Political Equation" 33-52.

Is this, then, to say that Islam is intrinsically violent and supportive of violence?²⁶ Is one to attribute the New York Trade Centre catastrophe directly to Islam? Surely there are masses of Muslims who, consciously or unconsciously, reject terrorism and even the military face of Islam associated with jihad in Islam.²⁷ And surely even if they recognize the historical reality of jihad in traditional Islam, it is still theirs to reject its present validity because, they feel, jihad ought to have been a temporarily imposed duty only and is now obsolete and in need of reinterpretation.²⁸ In any case, it is ultimately God's prerogative to judge the terrorist and his act, as well as his intention and source of inspiration.

Yet, at the same time, if jihad is a concern for society (Muslim and non-Muslim), it is imperative that society examine Islam's source materials and the understanding of the great expositors on the subject. The majority of the Qur'an's texts themselves clearly identify jihad as physical warfare in Islam and, Islamically, God's way of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. They hardly require to be interpreted metaphorically. Likewise, from the Hadith and the earliest biographies of Muhammad it is just as evident that the early Muslim community understood these Quranic texts to be taken literally. Historically, therefore, from the time of Muhammad onwards, jihad as physical warfare in support of the message of Islam has been a reality for the Muslim community. Hence it comes as no surprise when even terrorists easily appeal to these source materials to justify their actions, not to speak of their teachers who teach the theory and the art of terrorism.

Nor, it may be added, should it cause surprise that many other Muslims today seriously oppose its violent implications and seek out new interpretations. For this we may be grateful.

²⁶ For a provocative discussion in the form of a "case history" (Islam in Iran at the time of the Shah and the Revolution vs. the Church in Iran, the assassination of converts from Islam, and the status of Christian mission activity) see Kenneth Cragg's "Editor's Postscript" in Bishop Dehqani Tafti's *The Unfolding Design of My World* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2000) 257-266. During the revolution the son of the Bishop was murdered and, on one occasion, the Bishop himself narrowly escaped being killed.

²⁷ For the Ahmadiyya Movement, which virtually dissociates jihad from its traditional Islamic meaning of warfare and its history, see "Ahmadiyya," *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Ithica: Cornell University, 1953). Many Muslims and some Muslim nations consider this movement to be non-Islamic.

²⁸ Thus the moderate Muslim Sa'id al-Ashmawy, former chief justice of Egypt's supreme court, in his popular article in *Readers Digest*, Jan. 1996, 25-28. He says: "Actually, the Koran's call to arms, or jihad, relates to a specific episode when the Prophet prepared to attack his enemies from the city of Mecca. It was never intended as a prescription for permanent warfare...." Another contemporary Egyptian scholar, Mahmud Shaltut, criticizes the traditional Islamic doctrine of abrogation as a valid principle for Quranic interpretation. For this latter comment see Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Medieval and Modern Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 26. The Sudanese scholar, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, has contended that Meccan Islam alone (not Medinan Islam) qualifies to be the substance of a relevant and universal religion today. He understands the Medinan textual abrogations (*naskh*) of Meccan texts to be temporal only. Given this understanding, he says, Muslims can develop a new Shari'ah which is based on the morality of Meccan (earlier) Islam and which would abandon the various forms of discrimination that characterize Islam's present Shari'ah, including discrimination against women (Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, Translation and Introduction by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im [Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987] 21-25). For his comments on jihad see 132-137. His stance, considered by the Sudanese government as blasphemy, eventually cost him his life.

Then, what about the Muslim claims that Islam means peace, that it is in harmony with other religions, that it rejects violence? No doubt, for Muslims Islam may mean peace in its traditional Muslim sense, i.e., in so far as they have submitted to the conditions Islam imposes upon them. However, Islamically speaking, Islam has never meant peace for idolaters unless the idolaters abandon idolatry and embrace Islam. Nor, Islamically, has Islam meant peace for the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), unless the People of the Book submit to Islamic political rule and the *dhimmi* conditions which the Shari`ah imposes upon them as the People of the Book. Thus, Muslims must clarify the nature of Islam's peace, for whom and under what conditions Islam means peace, and how Islam promotes racial and religious harmony with other races and religions. Likewise, if jihad does not mean holy war, let Muslims explain why not and what it does mean. Surely, if by Islamic definition the primary purpose of jihad is the extension and defence of Islamic dominion, it also includes, under the shadow of war, the invitation to the enemy to submit to Islamic rule, perhaps even to embrace Islam itself, or to fight. Islamically, the invitation is compulsory and naturally precedes any battle. Truly, both word and sword are integral to jihad, yoked equally and working in harmony.

A Christian Response

But, as conversation on the topic frequently continues, who are the Christians to complain about jihad when they themselves have engaged in their own forms of jihad throughout their history, and that not only against non-Christians but also, on occasions, even against other Christians! Have they forgotten the Crusades? Contrast how Jews and Christians thrived under Muslim rule in Spain with how the Christians later drove Muslims and Jews out from Spain. And what about European imperialism, colonialism and the occupation of Muslim lands?

Whatever Muslim and non-Muslim response to the above episodes of history may be, there is no doubt that both Muslims and non-Muslims can compile their own long lists of shameful actions by Christians, perpetrated in the name of the Messiah.

That these actions were shameful, yet perpetrated in the name of the Messiah, makes them that much more reprehensible. Hence, finally, measured by the standards of the New Testament and by the teachings and actions of Jesus Himself, such actions cannot be deemed truly Christian!

What, then, does the New Testament teach about physical warfare and the Kingdom of God?²⁹ Initially, we note that Jesus Himself clearly distinguishes between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Caesar: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

²⁹ This is not to forget the indications of violence in the Old Testament.

With the coming of Jesus the Messiah the Kingdom of God has come. He comes not to abolish God's Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). He summarizes the Law as love for God and love for the neighbour:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus elaborates on what it means to love one's neighbour:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 6:43-48)

Jesus as the Messiah sets an example of love when He Himself washes the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17):

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:12,13)

The disciples of Jesus are to love with the greater love, even as Jesus has loved His disciples by dying for them. He also says:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24,25; Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:35; Luke 17:33; John 12:25)

Especially relevant to our whole concern here is Jesus' own definition of His Messiahship in terms of servanthood and self sacrifice, and His rejection of resorting to the sword against those who reject Him and His message when

1. He (a Jew) rebuked His disciples (Jews) for suggesting that He destroy the Samaritans (the enemy) who rejected them (Luke 8:51-56). No doubt, the angry disciples were aware of His power! How effective – and sweet – even a small dosage of revenge, clinically executed! More so when executed against the Samaritans, Israel's despised enemy! It is this context of mutual contempt between Samaritans and Jews which lends deeper significance to Jesus' “Good Samaritan” parable, i.e., for the Jew how could any Samaritan be good, even better than a Jew?
2. He rebuked His disciple Peter for rejecting His prophecy that He, as the Messiah, must suffer, be killed and rise from the dead. (Mark 8:27-33)

3. He told His power-hungry disciples that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Here, clearly, Jesus suggests His death has redemptive meaning for others.
4. He, in the Garden of Gethsemane, rebuked Peter for defending Him with his sword:

Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me? (John 18:11)

5. Jesus, during His trial before the Roman governor Pilate, stated:

My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here. (John 18:36)

The New Testament testifies to Jesus’ resistance to constant temptations throughout His ministry, whether from Satan (Matthew 4:1-11), from “the people” (John 5) or even from Jesus’ own disciples (Mark 8:31-33), to abandon His Heavenly Father’s will for Himself as Messiah and for the advent of the Kingdom of God. Do we see all these temptations coalescing and culminating as He, the Messiah, actually hangs naked on a cross, a spectacle of pathos, shame and derision?

Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him (Mark 15:29-32).³⁰

Yet, given His power, who would doubt that He could have come down from the cross! His disciples clearly understood His power. *What they misunderstood was how His power was to be used!* It was His Father’s will that He so be baptized (= drowned) and drink the cup (of suffering and death) for which He had come: He had come to heal the sick, to be the friend of sinners. He had come not to destroy but to save, to redeem. How often it has been said – and how often it bears repeating! – that God’s love, not nails and ropes, held Jesus on the cross! To lay down one’s life for one’s friends: Greater love has no one than this. What Jesus taught, He lived, and what He taught and lived, He taught His

³⁰ The Qur’an’s principal reference to the crucifixion of Jesus reads: “And because of their (the Jews) saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger – they slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them...; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself” (4:157,158). Though Muslim interpretations of these verses widely differ, generally Muslims have accepted that God rescued Jesus: Before Jesus was put on a cross, God took him to heaven and someone else, made to look like Jesus, was crucified. The rationale: How could God allow Jesus’ enemies to triumph over Jesus, His faithful prophet, let alone allow him to suffer and die the shameful and accursed death of crucifixion! How vivid here the difference between Muslim and Christian understanding of “the power and wisdom of God”! (See Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian*, 46.)

disciples to live and to teach. How much Christians, too, need to remember that Christian ethics are inextricably connected with Jesus' Cross! Who Jesus is, what He has done and the manner of His invitation to us to follow Him are wonderfully summarized in the New Testament's early hymn of praise:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Truly, both sovereignty and service characterize the Messiah's person and are equally yoked in His ministry on earth. The motivating power is God's love and holiness.

For Jesus' bewildered disciples it all came together when they saw Jesus risen from the dead, when they experienced that through Jesus' death and resurrection, death had lost its sting, had died. Everything in the New Testament points to the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the coming of God's Holy Spirit as the source of the disciples' conversion, their new understanding, their new hope and unflagging courage in proclaiming the Christian Gospel. These same Gospel events became the heart of the disciples' message which changed the hearts of so many others throughout the Roman Empire. Even with all the weaknesses and flaws within the early Church, the early Church rapidly spread throughout the Empire, with little or no support from the Empire's political, economic or social institutions and, in fact, despite the Empire's continual persecution of the Church for about three hundred years. There is no other explanation for its spread. For our purposes here it is significant that throughout the New Testament's account of the Acts of the Apostles and the spread of the Church no disciple of Jesus appeals to the sword in support of the defence or advancement of the Kingdom of God and the Church.

In brief, Jesus' disciples are to follow the way of Jesus. They are to have the mind of Jesus the Messiah, to look at the world, the people of all nations, and even their own enemies through the eyes of Jesus. They will share God's message of reconciliation, forgiveness of sin, new life and eternal peace through Jesus with all. Their motivation will be His love and their means His means.

On the basis of the New Testament there is no place for the sword for advancing the Kingdom of God!

A Prayer

O God, pour out Your blessing on the people of Islam.

Grant that these, who always proclaim Your greatness, may know the greatness of Your love revealed in Jesus the Messiah.

Forgive us that so little of Your love has reached the Muslims through us.

Take away from us our pride and our coldness.

Teach us to love our Muslim neighbor as ourselves.

Help us to understand them and to help them understand Your Gospel.

And if any of us should suffer at the hands of Muslims, teach us to overcome evil with good,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.³¹

³¹ *Christian Witness among Muslims*, 1994 (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company) 118.

Appendix

In Sum, from a Christian Vantage Point³²

... In the main body of Islam, apart from the Shi`ah and Sufism, the assumption has generally been that God's cause triumphs manifestly. The battles in early Islam are almost uniformly explained by Muslim writers as necessary to the survival of Islam. Had they not been undertaken, the infant faith would have been destroyed. The hypothesis clearly is that force is valid in the Prophet's hands and name. So ultimately Muhammad rode into a prostrate Mecca and by that victory clinched the submission of the tribes. Jesus in Jerusalem chose to refuse external patterns of success. They were within his reach and to his hand. He rejected them for the way of the Cross. This contrast must be understood by all who would enter into the meaning of the Cross. It is all the more marked because the situations of Jesus in Jerusalem and Muhammad in Mecca are in some measure analogous. Both faced an opposition to religious truth based on prestige and pride. Both were rejected as upstarts, disruptive of the status quo. The Pharisees and the Quraish – though otherwise highly contrasted – are thus far alike. But there the similarity ends. Jesus did not conquer Jerusalem. He suffered outside its walls. The Cross became his throne.

It is necessary to present this contrast tenderly and without reproach. Until it is understood, the Cross as the key to the kingdom of heaven can never be seen in its fullness. There are some Muslims who think Jesus pitiable in his very choice. But such voices are rare and might well be rarer had not Christendom so often taken the oppressive way and forsaken the pattern of the Cross. Freed to draw by its own force, the Cross remains the magnet of human souls. When the contrasted patterns of Christendom are cited, let it be remembered that, though these reproaches must have their reckoning, it is the Christ of the Cross whom we are calling others to seek and find. Faiths must surely first be understood in their architects before they are assessed in their followers.

This, then, is the word of the Cross by which the Church lives. There always remains about it that which to some is an offense and foolishness. The recognition of the Cross as the place of pardon and peace, of divine mercy in action for human remaking, comes only in the Holy Spirit. Our task is to be wise and patient instruments of that Illuminator of the hearts in whose light human beings see light and through whom they recognize as the lover of their souls the one who suffered and rose again:

Hath He diadem as monarch
That His brow adorns?
Yea, a crown – in very surety
But of thorns.

³² The Appendix is extracted from Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 2nd edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books) 273, 274. In first paragraph "Quraish" is the name of the tribe Muhammad.