



COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

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IB WORLD RELIGIONS

Word Count: 1795

Criterion A: Rationale and preliminary research

Facebook's comment section is a lot of things. It might be a civilized vehicle for polite debate with strangers who might have differing perspectives from oneself. It might be a common ground for which the human race can unite for a single cause, whether it be for global warming or saving gorillas.

Or, Facebook's comment section might be a gathering of racists, bigots, and misogynists who, within the safety of the internet, seem to have lost any measure of verbal self-control.

That's the type of comment section I usually find under posts concerning any terrorism linked to Islam. A few examples:



Alex JahBlunt Cowburn I wouldn't trust the civilians though at the start I remember majority of the sunni muslims were willing to have ISIS there some even worshipped it

Like · Reply · 13 · November 4 at 10:29am · Edited

Or this:



Sam Halpin Another muslim terrorist attack by the so called religion of peace, when will governments do more about stopping these lot !!!

Like · Reply · 7 · July 15 at 5:12am

14 Replies

Or even better, this:



Chris Liam Mee Woooowwww one person out of how many fucking billion??? Who gives a fuck jog on lad Bible Muslim appeasing cunts shame they ain't in the 100s of thousands like when the pic of Mohammed was drawn aye....

Fuck Islam!!!!

Like · Reply · 29 · November 17, 2015 at 11:01am · Edited

94 Replies

But as much as Facebook is a breeding ground for Islamophobia, it also provided me with new perspectives on the topic of religious violence. Many users raised a valid point in their responses: how is Christianity so different? And having written my

sophomore project on the Crusades, I began to ask myself the same question. Hundreds of thousands have died in the name of Christianity; it is estimated that 1.7 million lost their lives in the Crusades alone (Abulafia). In the 30 Years' War, a third of Germany was wiped out (Abulafia). Considering these numbers, should we condone Christianity as a violent religion as well? It is with those questions in mind that I formulated my initial question to study: what are the causes of violence in Islam and Christianity?

In order to undertake my investigation, I consulted a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources. I looked specifically at text from the Qur'an and the Bible, taking note of verses directly referencing violence in the name of God and Allah. By studying these respective religious texts, I was able to form my own answer independent to outside influences. I was also able to hear directly from Mr. Hasam Rabi, a practicing Muslim and member of the Board of Trustee at a mosque in downtown Seattle. I then supplemented my perspective with several secondary sources; these included newspaper columns, argumentative essays, and other articles that professed their own ideas. Michael Brown of New York University argues:

1. That the Bible's references to violence are one-time deals, while Islam's are universal.
2. Most of the Bible's violent verses are rooted in the Old Testament.
3. Muhammad, who is supposed to be emulated, was far more violent than Jesus.

(Brown)

Brown's perspective is just one example of the multi-faceted arguments that can be made for both sides; overall, by consulting various secondary sources, I was able to build a very balanced environment in which I could begin my investigation.

Word Count: 435

Criterion B: Plan for Study

In this investigation, I will be attempting to answer the research question: **Compare and contrast causes of religious violence in Christianity and Islam.** I will be working with this question in the scope of the past 200 years, just before the end of the American Civil War and onwards.

I chose this scope because much of the controversy that is associated with Islam presides in today's modern world. Both religions have equally extensive histories of religion; yet today, Christianity is not viewed with nearly the same amount of animosity. We can assume that this is because of much more recent developments in Islam that fall within the past 200 years.

Additionally, my findings place an emphasis on the modern application of religion rather than its behavior in ancient civilizations, which leads me to cite more recent examples. Specifically, I will be considering two examples of religious extremism that remain sharp in current memory: the Iranian Revolution and the Ku Klux Klan. By setting a more recent scope, I can appraise both religions in a relevant context to contemporary religion.

Word Count: 179

Criterion C: Summary of Findings

The first step of my investigation was a quantitative analysis of passages stipulating violence in the Bible and the Qur'an. This was performed by software engineer Tom Anderson, who marked passages that referenced key words associated with harm. Mr. Anderson found that both the Old and New Testament of the Bible mentioned these key terms more frequently than the Qur'an; according to him, "Killing and destruction are referenced slightly more often in the New Testament (2.8%) than in the Quran (2.1%), but the Old Testament clearly leads—more than twice that of the Quran—in mentions of destruction and killing (5.3%)" (Osbourne). His results have been supported by other studies as well, leading to what seems a contradiction in the face of the conservative Christian perspective.

I then decided to delve into these passages, looking for verses in both books that advocated violence. In the Bible, I was able to find violence in varying degrees: from capital punishment for the smallest transgression to genocide. The worst offenders are as follows:

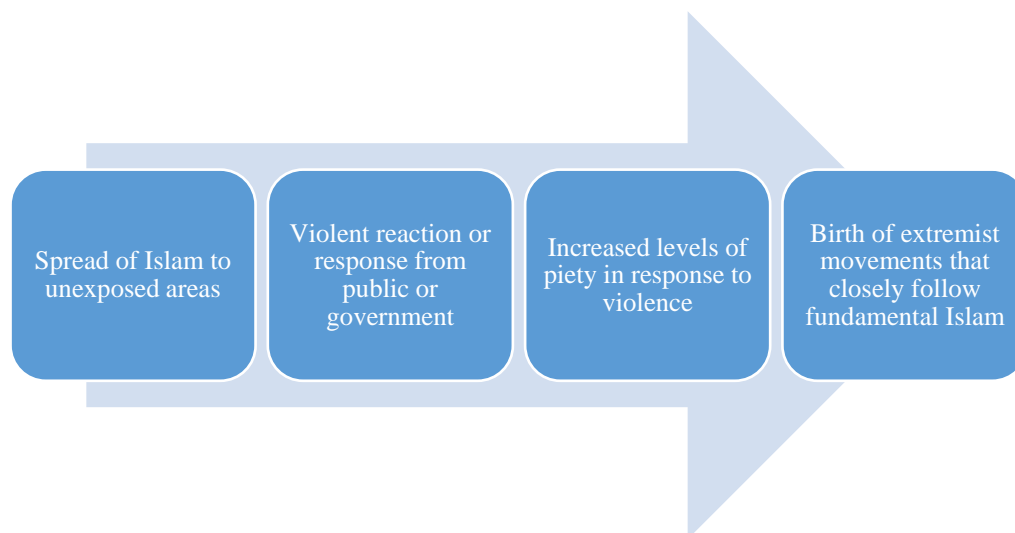
In the first book of Samuel, God commands Samuel to "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (*The Holy Bible*).

On the other hand, in the Qur'an, Allah declares that:

"Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled, and those who strive hard and fight in the Cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred in grades those who strive hard and fight with their wealth and their lives above those who sit (at home). Unto each, Allah has promised good, but Allah has preferred those who strive hard and fight, above those who sit by a huge reward" (Palmer).

From both Holy books, we have found verses that not only encourage violence, but violence on a near-universal level. That begs the question: how do we decide which religion is more violent? Is it even possible to do so?

During our interview, Mr. Rabi shared his perspective on the topic with me; his belief was that any religion must be viewed in the historical context it finds itself (Rabi). Because Islam was introduced violently to the modern world, higher levels of piety are seen as necessary, which gives birth to extremism. The crux of his argument is shown in a step-by-step model below:



Another expert whom I was able to hear from was Karen Armstrong, a former Catholic nun who has written several books on comparative religion. Her stance coincidentally was very similar to Mr. Rabi's; she stated in an interview that:

All religions have been violent, including Christianity. There was nothing in the Muslim world like antisemitism: that is an import of the modern period. They got it from us. The missionaries brought it over. And then came the state of Israel. Judaism has become violent in the modern world, thanks to the nation state" (Thorpe).

That the perspectives of these two experts share such sharp similarities suggests that there must be at least some degree of merit in their opinions. Their opinions, as well as the information discussed beforehand, will be analyzed in the following section.

Word Count: 544

Criterion D: Critical Reflection and Evaluation

By reflecting upon my findings, I realized that my initial thought process was misplaced. My belief was cultivated by the mainstream media – I felt that the roots of violence in either religion originated from their fundamental texts, the Bible and the Qur'an. But as I delved deeper into my research, it became clear that I was wrong. I found my own opinion developing in stark similarity with those of Ms. Armstrong and Mr. Rabi: that any religion must be evaluated in the world it currently lives and breathes in.

Everywhere I looked, I could find examples of this philosophy in play. Many Muslim countries today continue to follow aspects of the Qur'an that we Westerners view as indicative of backwards ideology, and these countries all share violently non-secular histories. In the bloody Iran Revolution of 1979, upwards of 60,000 perished in clashes with government forces (Thorpe). Even after the revolution took place, leadership devolved into an Islamic squabble for power between rival factions that often resulted in more bloodshed (Thorpe). If we were to follow Mr. Rabi's extremist flowchart, we would presume that all of this violence would result in higher levels of piety, and in turn, modern-day adherence to practices that are considered uncultured and even savage. Indeed, in today's Iran, 66% of women are subject to domestic abuse during their first year of marriage, something that is tacitly accepted and even justified by the fundamentals of the Qur'an (Thorpe).

According to the model that Mr. Rabi presented, domestic abuse in Iran is not a reflection of modern Islam as a collective whole, although it certainly is a common thread. Instead, we must view domestic abuse as a reaction to a violent introduction of Islam into the modern world.

The same pattern of thought can be applied to Christianity as well. While the Ku Klux Klan is not seen as accurately representative of modern Christianity

today, it's motives can be traced back to the Bible's most prehistoric of teachings, unearthed by decades of hardship. Even today, the Klan's official website cites the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as evidence arguing against racial integration (We, The Loyal White Knights).

Textbooks teach us that the first Klan formed during Reconstruction as a supremacist reaction to the progression of civil rights for African Americans. But at the same time, that advancement in civil rights was due to a horrific amount of violence in the Civil War, and consequently, a shattered Southern infrastructure and society as a whole. More modern versions of the Klan have cited the inevitability of a race war as legitimate reason to engage in terrorism (We, The Loyal White Knights). From these perspectives, it becomes clear that the KKK, a violent offshoot of contemporary Christianity, was above all a reaction to historical dynamics of its time.

However, this investigation gives us far from a conclusive answer on the topic. It cites testimonies provided by two very religiously liberal individuals, neglecting an entire half of a spectrum. My understanding of the topic would have been much better served by seeking out conservative Christians, as well as perhaps sending a politely-worded email to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi asking for an interview. In the end, my argument does reflect a heavily idealistic view on religion that betrays my own liberal upbringing, and a conservative viewpoint would have been appreciated.

But I will nonetheless reiterate my snowflake perspective: any religion, whether it be Islam, Christianity, or the Church of Euthanasia, cannot be judged by modern practices or its fundamental teachings. Instead, the direction of each religion is dictated by surrounding historical trends. The trends that have lasting impact are typically inclined towards violence, which translates to violent practice of the religion. Ultimately, to judge any religion as fundamentally violent is a perspective blatantly negligent of the universal message that the religion propagates.

Word Count: 629

Criterion E: References

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