

## **Déjà vu all over again: The Christian Church's response to the First Islamic Invasion, and how it compares to the Church's response to Islam today**

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In the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Islam stormed throughout the Middle East, across North Africa, and even into Spain before the forces under Charles Martel near Tours, France, halted it in 732. In a mere one hundred years after the death of Muhammad, one-third of the Christian world was subjected to the rule of a new religion that John of Damascus (675-749) called the “heresy of the Ishmaelites.” How did the Christian Church respond to the invasion of Islam? Why was Islam so successful in subduing Christianity even though the Muslims were in the minority? Why did so many Christians convert to Islam?

Christian testimonies from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries reveal that the Church was not ready for the conquest by the Muslims. Some church leaders believed that the invasion was the result of the rebellious sin of God's people. Others believed that God was testing their faith. Still others thought that the invaders were actually rescuing them from the onerous rule of the Byzantines. Only when it was too late did the Church wake up to find its crosses removed and its freedom forsaken.

Today the Church in the West is facing another challenge from Islam as Muslims move into Western Europe and America. Often there is uncertainty on the part of the church leaders as they try to determine the role the Church should play in its engagement of Islam. Should Christians respond with open arms of peace or should they engage in theological battles? The future of the West hung in the balance on the battlefields of France in 732. Has the Church learned from its past

mistakes so that it will be triumphant and raise the victory banner of Christ high?  
And will that banner display a lion or a lamb?

This paper will compare two periods of Islamic confrontation with the Church, and it will seek to provide a possible solution to the dilemma that many Christians face today by looking to the past as well as to the future.

Headlines:

- The number of Christians around the world today facing persecution is estimated at 100<sup>1</sup> to 200 million.<sup>2</sup>
- It is also estimated that a Christian is killed for his faith every five minutes.<sup>3</sup>
- “The vast majority of those martyrs are being killed in the Islamic world.”<sup>4</sup>
- “Most of the territories that were Christian in the year 700 are now Muslim.”<sup>5</sup>
- By the year 750, a hundred years after the conquest of Jerusalem, at least 50 percent of the world’s Christians found themselves under Muslim hegemony.<sup>6</sup>
- “In 1900, at the height of the Golden Age, 20 percent of the Middle East was still Christian, whereas today less than 2 percent is, and the Christian population is rapidly dwindling.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Response of the Middle Eastern Christians (7<sup>th</sup> Century)**

When the Arabs began conquering the cities of the Middle East, some non-Muslim eyewitnesses believed that their attackers were a punishment from God for their own spiritual rebellion or for sins committed by other rival Christian groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Heneghan, “About 100 million Christians persecuted around the world:

<sup>2</sup> “200 million Christians in 60 countries subject to persecution,” Catholic News Agency, June 19, 2007. Cited in Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> “Sociologist: Every 5 Minutes a Christian is Martyred,” Zenit, June 3, 2011. Cited in Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Wilken, “Christianity Face to face with Islam,” *First Things*, 2008, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/01/001-christianity-face-to-face-with-islam>, accessed 11/14/2014.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam’s New War on Christians* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2013), 14.

For example, Dionysus, a Syrian Monophysite, believed that the invasion was the scourge of God against the Byzantine church as punishment for its belief in the two natures of Christ. The Byzantines, in turn, blamed the Monophysites for their heresy. For others, the invaders were precursors of the Antichrist. In addition, some theologians, like John of Damascus, recognized similar, but deficient beliefs in the new intermediate monotheism and considered it to be merely a *heresy* of Christianity.

Walter Kaegi examines a number of these eyewitness accounts. He writes that Sophronius believed the Arab invasion was divine punishment for Christian sin: “Because of countless sins and very serious faults” (139); Anastasias perceived the Arab conquest was a divine retribution for Christian sins, also, especially the fault of Emperor Constans for his persecution of the Orthodox Church (143); Sebeos blamed Christians themselves: “for we have merited it, for we have sinned against the Lord” (146); Pseudo-Methodius was another who believed it was “because of the lawlessness of the Christians” (143); and John of Nikiu, who was a Monophysite, said that it was due to divine anger against the errors of the Chalcedonian Christians (148).<sup>8</sup> A number of the witnesses testified not only to the brutality of the invading forces, but also to their godless nature.<sup>9</sup> Others, however, testified that while some in the marauding forces were pagan, others seemed to espouse a type of

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Emil Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest," *Church History* 38, 2 (June, 1969), 139-149. See also Abdul-Massih Saadi, "Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources," chap. in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, Gabriel Reynolds, ed., Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān (London: Routledge, 2008), 219.

<sup>9</sup> Sophronius' Christmas sermon for AD 634; Latin text, PG 87 col. 3205 lines 48ff. See Yehuda Nevo, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 2003), 105.

monotheism that incorporated definite Jewish overtones mixed with an amalgamation of Arab traditions and anti-Christian beliefs.<sup>10</sup> Most of the Byzantine inhabitants seemed to expect that the invaders would be beaten back by a reinforcement of the Byzantine army, but after that hope faded a bewilderment set in as they determined to make the best of the situation. The invading forces called themselves *muhajirun*, “emigrants,” or *mu’minun*, the “believers.” Yet, exactly what they believed in was not readily apparent.

One thing we can pick up from a number of the early documents is that the Arabs espoused a form of a transitional, monotheistic religion similar to the forms of Judaism and Christianity found in that area.<sup>11</sup> For example, the *Homily on the Child Saints of Babylon*, written sometime in the 640s, referred to the Saracens as religious yet barbaric. They would boast about their fasts and prayer, but were also regarded as “oppressors” who “massacre and lead into captivity the sons of men.”<sup>12</sup> Their religious activities were present, apparently, but not very efficacious. About that same time, Thomas the Presbyter (wr. ca. 640), writing in Syriac, relates how the Arabs invaded and conquered Syria in 635-636, even killing a number of monks when they stormed the monasteries.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Homily on the Child Saints of Babylon*, 36. See Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1997), 121. This view of a type of monotheism is also found in the dialogue of the Patriarch John of Sedreh and the Emir developed in Nevo, *Crossroads to Islam*, 224, 228.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Janosik, "Early Islam According to the Neo-Revisionists," Occasional Papers in the Study of Islam and Other Faiths (Summer 2009).

<sup>12</sup> *Homily on the Child Saints of Babylon*, 36. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Apparently the monasteries of Qedar and Bnata (Thomas the Presbyter, *Chronicle*, 148).

Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, recorded in his Christmas sermon of 634 that the reason the Arabs blocked the Christmas procession to Bethlehem that year was due to the many “sins and gravest errors” committed by the people of God, and therefore they were “unfit” to make their annual pilgrimage to the holy site.<sup>14</sup> From this sermon we can ascertain that the Arabs were in control of the area in the year 634 and they had limited the access to the town of Bethlehem. However, when Sophronius refers to the conquerors as “vengeful and God-hating Saracens,”<sup>15</sup> who carried a “blood-loving blade,”<sup>16</sup> he was not only saying that they were prone to violence, but he was also strongly indicating that they were not religious. Yet, in 639 Sophronius gives an account of the “godless Saracens” entering Jerusalem and building a place “intended for their prayer called a mosque (*midzgitha*).”<sup>17</sup> This may indicate, as other sources have confirmed, that at least the leaders were religious while many of the warriors were merely involved for personal gain.

For example, in the discussion between the Patriarch John of Sedreh and an Arab governor referred to as the “Emir,” which took place around 644, we can determine that though the Emir was religious, following a basic monotheism with Jewish-Christian associations, he was not a Muslim and he did not mention Muhammad, Islam nor the Qur’ān.<sup>18</sup> Along with other eyewitness accounts from this time period, a picture emerges

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<sup>14</sup> Sophronius' Christmas sermon for AD 634; Latin text, PG 87 col. 3205 lines 48ff. See Nevo, *Crossroads to Islam*, 105, as well as John V. Tolan. *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 41-43.

<sup>15</sup> Sophronius, *Holy Baptism*, 166-167. See Hoyland, *Islam as Others Saw It*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> Sophronius, *Christmas Sermon*, 515. See Hoyland, *Islam as Others Saw It*, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Sophronius, *Pratum spiritual*, 100-102. See Hoyland, *Islam as Others Saw It*, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Nevo, *Crossroads to Islam*, 224, 228. See also Abdul-Massih Saadi, “Nascent Islam in the seventh Century Syriac Sources,” 219-220.

which details at least a religious elite that followed a type of intermediate monotheism that was neither Christian nor Jewish, yet derived many elements from both of these religions. This may be the reason that these marauding forces gained an early acceptance; at least in the beginning.

From a more distant perspective, the Christian Theophanes, writing in his *Chronicle* in 815, claimed that the Jews first flocked to Muhammad because they thought that he was the promised Messiah. When they discovered that he was not the prophesied leader they had been expecting, they continued to follow out of fear.<sup>19</sup> Theophanes also speculates that the reason that the Saracens were able to conquer vast territories was due to the “corruption and ineptitude of Byzantine officials,” such as neglecting to pay the Arab mercenaries who had been guarding the borders so that these Arabs switched sides and supported the Arab movement.<sup>20</sup> However, Theophanes claims that the most dramatic reason for the success of the Saracens was that the emperor Heraclius, who had recent success over the Persians, inexplicably began favoring the Monothelite interpretation of the nature of Christ, and due to following this heresy God used the Saracens to punish the erroneous judgment of the Byzantine leader. As Tolan indicates, “For Theophanes, the Islamic conquests are clearly part of God’s plan: they are foretold by prophets and by natural disasters, and Muhammad’s life corresponds to that of previous heresiarchs. Just as God had in previous times sent Amalek from the desert to smite Israel when it went astray, so he did again in the reign of Heraclius.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John Tolan, *Saracens*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> John Tolan, *Saracens*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> John Tolan, *Saracens*, 66.

Thus, we see that the Christians at that time were struggling to give an answer to the deeply troubling question, “Why should God allow the Saracens to be victorious and conquer such a large territory and reduce the majority Christian population to a lower status of *dhimmi*? Was God on the side of the Saracens and not the Christians?” Many were waiting for the Byzantine forces to rally and push the Saracens back down into Arabia, but the Byzantine forces were battle weary after their long war with the Persians, and after several embarrassing battles the main forces retreated north leaving most of Syria and Palestine exposed to the enemy. At first the new “masters” lived in garrison towns and were satisfied with collecting taxes from the majority Christians at a distance. This allowed them to maintain solidarity and control of their own forces. In this initial period of control, the taxes were not as heavy as those imposed by the Byzantine government, and with the Saracens living away from the cities, a number of Christian inhabitants were satisfied with the shift in governance. However, the power continued to shift and by the time of Abd ‘al-Malik, Christianity was being suppressed and the official language was changed from Greek to Arabic. As Islam continued to develop, Muslims began to take control of both religious and civil affairs. With greater power, fear became a motivating force. As Islam continued to subjugate Christian lands, the Christians were given three choices: Convert, Submit and pay the *jizya* (protection money), or Die (unless they were able to escape before that happened). By the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, Christians were being routinely persecuted, churches were being destroyed, and Christianity was being suppressed. At this time, many Christians left the area. Others converted to Islam because of economic need or sheer survival (the *dhimma* laws were quite onerous on the poor). One of the ironies of history is that all of this was affecting almost 50% of the Christian

population, yet Christians in Europe and the rest of the world were hardly aware of what was happening, and others were not really concerned until Islam was on their own doorstep. This is one reason it took almost 400 years before the European Christians launched a counter attack, which we know as the Crusades.

### **The Development of Control through the Practice of Dhimmitude**

It would be helpful at this point to understand how the practice of Dhimmitude developed. After Muhammad's death, the second caliph, Omar, is said to have instituted a series of "conditions" that guided the Muslims in their treatment of the conquered Christians. Rather than execute all the Christians who would not convert to Islam (since this would decimate the pool of needed workers), a third choice was often preferred – paying the "jizya," or head tax, with willing submission and "feeling themselves subdued." In essence, this meant that the subjugated Christians, or non-Muslims, were to purchase their lives back from their Muslim conquerors and live in such a way that they would feel constantly subdued. In order to regulate this lifestyle, a set of conditions was drawn up called the "Conditions of Omar." It is probable that these conditions were developed long after the time of the second caliph, Omar, but his name and time period are now firmly associated with the rules that guided the treatment of the subjugated class of second-class citizens who became known as the "Dhimmis," or "protected persons."

According to the "Conditions of Omar," the "dhimmis" were expected to agree to the following (speaking to their captors):

1. When you came to our countries, we asked you for safety for ourselves and the people of our community, upon which we imposed the following conditions on ourselves for you:
2. Not to build a church in the city – nor a monastery, convent, or monk's cell in the surrounding areas – and not to repair those that fall in ruins or are in Muslim quarters;



3. Not to prevent Muslims from lodging in our churches, by day or night, and to keep their doors wide open for [Muslim] passersby and travelers;
4. Not to display a cross on them [churches], nor raise our voices during prayer or readings in our churches anywhere near Muslims;
5. Nor to produce a cross or [Christian] book in the markets of the Muslims;
6. Not to display any signs of polytheism, nor make our religion appealing, nor call or proselytize anyone to it;
7. Not to prevent any of our relatives who wish to enter into Islam;
8. Not to possess or bear any arms whatsoever, nor gird ourselves with swords;
9. To honor the Muslims, show them the way, and rise up from our seats if they wish to sit down;
10. To host every traveling Muslim for three days and feed him adequately;
11. We guarantee all this to you upon ourselves, our descendants, our spouses, and our neighbors, and if we change or contradict these conditions imposed upon ourselves in order to receive safety, we forfeit our dhimma [covenant], and we become liable to the same treatment you inflict upon the people who resist and cause sedition”<sup>22</sup>

Other restrictions were added over time. Omar reputedly added another one: “that Christians never raise their hands against a Muslim, including in self-defense.”<sup>23</sup>

**There were restrictions on expressions of worship:**<sup>24</sup>

Churches could not be repaired, crosses and Bibles could not be displayed, and the sounds of Christian prayers, bells, and singing were not permitted beyond the boundaries of the church.

**There were restrictions on freedom:**

Proselytizing Muslims was banned, as was any form of blasphemy toward Muslims, the prophet or Islam in general. Also, any Muslim who converted to Christianity was charged with apostasy and subject to the death penalty.

**Christians were assigned an inferior social status:**

Dhimmis were very much considered beneath the level of the Muslims. They had to humble themselves before Muslims, their testimony in court was not valid against a Muslim, they could not raise their hand against a Muslim even in self-defense, they could not hold public office or any other position over a Muslim, and a Christian man was forbidden to marry a Muslim woman, even though a Muslim man could marry a Christian woman. Christians and other non-Muslims were simply not considered equal in any way to Muslims.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 25-27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Summarized from Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 28-29.

These restrictions were established in the early days, and during the period of colonialism they were overturned as the Muslims experienced the humiliation of losing their hegemony to the Western world. However, as Ibrahim reminds us, “these debilitations and humiliations, which were inflicted upon the Christians of the Islamic world in the past, are at this moment being inflicted upon the Christians of the Islamic world in the present, as a natural consequence of Muslims returning to the authentic teachings of Islam.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, the *Conditions of Omar* is being dusted off and revived in a number of locations in the Middle East. For example, during a Friday sermon, Saudi Sheikh Marzouk Salem al-Ghamdi advocated a return to the past.

If the infidels live among the Muslims, in accordance with the conditions set out by the Prophet – there is nothing wrong with it provided they pay Jizya to the Islamic treasury. Other conditions are ... that they do not renovate a church or a monastery, do not rebuild ones that were destroyed, that they feed for three days any Muslim who passes by their homes ... that they rise when a Muslim wishes to sit, that they do not imitate Muslims in dress and speech, nor ride horses, nor own swords, nor arm themselves with any kind of weapon; that they do not sell wine, do not show the cross, do not ring church bells, do not raise their voices during prayer, that they shave their hair in front so as to make them easily identifiable, do not incite anyone against the Muslims, and do not strike a Muslim ... If they violate these conditions, they have no protection.<sup>26</sup>

If these were the words of a Muslim fanatic, that would be one thing. However, Ibrahim demonstrates that the Conditions of Omar are very much on the rise again:

Churches in Muslim countries are regularly bombed, burned, or simply denied permits to renovate or even to exist. Crosses are burned and Bibles are confiscated. Muslim converts to Christianity are often violently attacked and sometimes executed. Christians accused of committing “blasphemy” – which can mean simply discussing Islam, or even Christianity – are assaulted and killed. Jizya is

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<sup>25</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Spencer, *Muslim Persecution of Christians* (Sherman Oaks: David Horowitz Freedom Center, 2011), 41-42.

exacted from Christians once again. Christians are forced to convert to Islam. Christian women and children are abducted and raped.<sup>27</sup>

### **Events leading up to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

After the eventual failure of the Crusades, the world of Islam was kept at arm's length only by constant vigilance. Bernard Lewis writes, "For more than a thousand years, Europe, that is to say Christendom, was under constant threat of Islamic attack and conquest. If the Muslims were repelled in one region, they appeared in greater strength in another."<sup>28</sup> However, this all changed during what became known as the Christian Golden Age in the Middle East. After the conquest of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798, the Islamic hegemony in the Middle East was slowly broken down until in 1856 the Ottoman Empire was pressured to issue reforms that abolished the jizya tax on Christians as well as the Sharia laws governing "dhimmis," or the non-Muslims living under the subjugation and humiliation of the dominant Muslims. Raymond Ibrahim says that "for the first time in Islam's 1,200 years of existence (at the time), non-Muslim subjects were to be treated as equal to Muslims, and their right to religious freedom and worship was to be guaranteed."<sup>29</sup>

Through this reform the colonial rule ended the caliphate and modernized the Muslim Middle East. The western form of government was respected and Western culture was emulated (western clothes, no hijabs, etc). Colonies were given their independence and Christians were given an equal status with Muslims and there was relative peace between the religions. This all changed, however, when

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<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 126.

<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 12.

Muslims like Sayyid Qutb rejected the Western worldview and called for a return to the days of the caliphate. Raymond Ibrahim explains that this rejection of Western values is something that the West cannot comprehend.

When the West, or at least popular culture in the West, became spiritually bankrupt and began apologizing for itself, Muslims, disgusted, turned back to Islam and its way, the Sharia – all, of course, to Western approval and encouragement. And now the myopic West cannot comprehend that Muslims have gone back to treating Christians in the exact same ways Muslims treated Christians before Muslims began to emulate the West. That history is all but lost. In fact, the cognitive dissonance between what the multiculturalists in the West believe about the benign and even superior culture of Islam, and what is reported as actually taking place in the Muslim world, is so great that many Westerners simply cannot take in the facts.<sup>30</sup>

In time, the Muslim world began to reclaim its former Islamic identity and Islamic practices from the past are returning in full force. One of these practices is Christian persecution. Much of the Muslim leadership against the West is found in Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Al Shabab, and now the Islamic State. These organizations promise its followers rewards in the present and much more to come in a future life. Ibrahim reminds us that, “From its very beginnings, Islam’s appeal was tied to its ability to offer its followers worldly success and prosperity. From Muslim prophet Muhammad’s first successful caravan raid at Badr to the centuries of jihad conquests that followed, Islam was synonymous with power and success. From the seventh century to the nineteenth, Muslims were accustomed to being the victors. Up until that time, they saw in Christian Europe just another part of the world that in due time would also

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<sup>30</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 17.

be conquered and annexed to Islam.”<sup>31</sup> With these renewed promises of a better life and more power, attacks on the West have become more prevalent. In fact, it is estimated that there have been over 24,000 terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslims on the West since 9/11.<sup>32</sup> However, the West is now battle-worn, much like the Byzantine empire in the time of early Islam. America also pulled out of Iraq and left it exposed, much like the Byzantines in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, in what was touted as the “Arab Spring,” the more secular powers were overthrown and the Islamic victors began to demand a stricter version of Islam which brought more oppression to Christians living in those countries. Ibrahim describes the consequences in this way:

From one end of the Muslim world to the other, Christians are suffering under the return of Sharia. Often translated as “Islamic law,” Sharia simply means the “Islamic way” of doing things. Accordingly, wherever and whenever Muslims are in power or getting more power, churches are outlawed, burned, and bombed, while Bibles and crucifixes are confiscated and destroyed. Freedom of speech – to speak positively of Christianity or critically of Islam – is denied, often on pain of death. Born Muslims who wish to convert to Christianity out of sincere religious conviction are denied this basic freedom, also on pain of death. Christians are deemed to be less than second-class citizens by many Muslim governments and Muslim populations. They cannot get justice against their Muslim oppressors. Christian women and children are routinely abducted, raped, and forced to convert to Islam. Increasingly, Christians are able to justify their very existence only by paying large amounts of ransom – money extorted in the name of “jihad,” Islam’s “holy war” to subjugate or eliminate non-Muslims.<sup>33</sup>

The recent advent of the Islamic State has clearly represented a return to the policies of Abd al-Malik in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. They have control of a large area and rule supreme in both religious and civil affairs. Fear is utilized as the main motivating

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<sup>31</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> JihadWatch.com

<sup>33</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 8.

force to ensure that their strict policies based on Sharia are carried out. Under the Islamic State persecution of Christians has greatly increased: churches are burned, Christian businesses are destroyed, individual Christians are denied police protection, and many have been executed for their faith. As in the past, there are three choices given to Christians: Convert, submit and pay the jizya, or die (unless they can escape before this happens). History seems to be repeating itself at the expense of Christianity.

It is interesting to note that as Muslims gain a greater majority in a country, the oppression of Christians becomes greater. We can see this trend in a study performed by Peter Hammond.

## Influence through Demographics<sup>34</sup>

Extent of Muslim Influence by the Numbers	Countries in this percent level
Less than 1% Muslims are regarded as peace-loving and not a threat; Muslim groups begin to work the system and push for an equal voice	United States, Australia, Canada, China, Italy, Norway
At 2% and 3% Proselytizing of minorities and major recruiting in jails and gangs takes place (Muslims expect majority governments to be compliant); will use our political systems, our constitutions based on freedom, and our educational systems against us	Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom, Spain, Thailand
From 5% on Disproportional influence; they will begin under-the-table coercion through the demand for halal food and religious "rights"; there is a push for the acceptance of Shariah law	France, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Trinidad & Tobago
10% or more of population Violence is often used in order to voice complaints and pressure the majority government; any non-Muslim action that offends Islam will bring violence and threats	Guyana, India, Israel, Kenya, Russia
After reaching 20% Riots become commonplace, Jihad militias form, persecution of Christians takes place, as well as church and synagogue burning	Ethiopia
At 40% you will find "widespread massacres, chronic terror attacks and ongoing militia warfare"	Nigeria, Bosnia, Chad, Lebanon
From 60% you may expect "unfettered persecution of non-believers and other religions, sporadic ethnic cleansing (genocide), use of Sharia Law as a weapon and Jizya, the tax placed on infidels"	Albania, Malaysia, Qatar, Sudan
After 80% expect "State run ethnic cleansing and genocide"	Bangladesh, Egypt, Gaza, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates
100% will "usher in the peace of 'Dar-es-Salaam' -- the Islamic House of Peace -- there's supposed to be peace because everybody is a Muslim"	Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen
But there is no peace!	Which Muslim country in the world has a thriving economy with freedom, security, and true peace for all of its citizens?

<sup>34</sup> Adapted from Peter Hammond, "What Islam Isn't," FrontPageMagazine.com, Monday, April 21, 2008.

## Comparison of “Stages”

It is evident from the comparison above that there are a number of similarities between the response of the church to Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are four general stages that are represented at both times -- denial, apathy, “complacent ignorance,” and fear. In regard to denial, those living outside the Middle East and North Africa in the centuries following the rise of Islam denied that there was much going on. When they did comprehend the gravity of the situation they were apathetic about getting involved. In fact, it took almost 400 years for the church to launch a counter attack (the Crusades). As one writer notes, there was also “complacent ignorance,”<sup>35</sup> because the Christians outside of the strike zone were more concerned with their own peace and security rather than learning more about the enemy and seeking to rescue their brothers in Christ. Finally, there was fear – fear of getting involved, fear of retaliation, and fear of the unknown. We see the same responses today. First, there is widespread denial. The most common form of denial is to say that the atrocities committed by the Islamists are not “true Islam.” President Obama has even said “ISIL is not ‘Islamic’” because “no religion condones the killing of innocents.”<sup>36</sup> John Kerry recently said, “The real face of Islam is a peaceful religion based on the dignity of all human beings.”<sup>37</sup> However, the leaders of the Islamic State beg to differ and vehemently claim to be not only “Islamic,” but even more Islamic than the *kafir* Muslims that they have killed for

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Wilken, *Christianity Face to Face with Islam*

<sup>36</sup> Barack Obama, Speech, [http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/10/politics/transcript-obama-syria-isis-speech/index.html?hpt=po\\_c1](http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/10/politics/transcript-obama-syria-isis-speech/index.html?hpt=po_c1)

<sup>37</sup> Brendon Bordelon, John Kerry’s speech, “The Real Face of Islam is a Peaceful Religion,” The Daily Caller, September 3, 2014.



their lack of faith. They have also justified their Jihad against Christians involving crucifixion, torture, beheadings and rape, based on a strict interpretation of the Qur'an. It is well known that there are many verses in the Qur'an that sanction violence against the Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Here are some of the more notable ones, called the "sword verses":

9:29: Allah commands the Muslim believers to "Fight those among the People of the Book who do not believe in Allah nor the Last Day, nor forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor embrace the religion of truth, until they pay the jizya with willing submission and feel themselves subdued."<sup>39</sup>

9:5 "And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakat, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

Both of these verses promote violent acts against Jews and Christians (People of the Book) because Islamists do not consider Jews or Christians "innocent." Jews are considered guilty because they rejected the God of Islam. Christians are guilty because they have associated Jesus Christ with God himself, which is considered "shirk," the most egregious of all sins according to Islam. Thus, if Jews and Christians are not innocent, and the Qur'an advocates their death or subjugation due to their rejection of Islam, then the Islamic State is only complying with the direct commands of the Qur'an. How can they then be said to be un-Islamic? Thus, to deny that the Islamic State is not Islamic is like saying that H<sub>2</sub>O is not water.

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<sup>38</sup> There are over 164 verses that deal with violent jihad in the Qur'an. See [http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Themes/jihad\\_passages.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Themes/jihad_passages.html)

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Ibrahim says, "This verse gives divine sanction to the perpetual subjugation of Christians under Islam."

Many are apathetic because the Middle East is far away and the persecution of millions of Christians is still considered a “distant problem.” One of the main reasons for this indifference on the part of Western Christians is due to “complacent ignorance”; the focus for many Christians is on self-interest, and as long as there is relative peace and prosperity at home, then persecution of Christians elsewhere is excused or dismissed. Finally, there is fear. This fear can actually drive the apathy, fuel the “complacent ignorance,” and even sanction denial, because it strikes at the deepest level of our being. Michael Dougherty says, “Fear of Islamic radicalism cows the West into silence on Christian persecution.”<sup>40</sup> He then goes on to quote Ernesto Galli della Loggia who writes that Europe fears the economic blackmail that “Arab Islam” commits by threatening riots or other violence if its demands for inordinate rights for Muslims or the silencing of critics are not met. “At the same time,” he continues, “and above all, it fears the ruthless terrorism, the many guerrillas that claim to be inspired by Islam, their cruel barbarity, as well as the movements of revolt that periodically deeply stir the masses of that world, always permeated by a sensibility that is extremely easy to light up and to break loose in violent xenophobia.”<sup>41</sup> It is Raymond Ibrahim, however, who has so thoroughly documented the persecution of Christians that is taking place in Muslim countries today that he can say,

From one end of the Muslim world to the other, Christians are suffering under the return of Sharia. Often translated as “Islamic law,” Sharia simply means the “Islamic way” of doing things. Accordingly, wherever and

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Dougherty, “Why is the West so afraid of Islam?”  
<http://theweek.com/article/index/265535/why-is-the-west-so-afraid-of-islam>

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

whenever Muslims are in power or getting more power, churches are outlawed, burned, and bombed, while Bibles and crucifixes are confiscated and destroyed. Freedom of speech – to speak positively of Christianity or critically of Islam – is denied, often on pain of death. Born Muslims who wish to convert to Christianity out of sincere religious conviction are denied this basic freedom, also on pain of death. Christians are deemed to be less than second-class citizens by many Muslim governments and Muslim populations. They cannot get justice against their Muslim oppressors. Christian women and children are routinely abducted, raped, and forced to convert to Islam. Increasingly, Christians are able to justify their very existence only by paying large amounts of ransom – money extorted in the name of “jihad,” Islam’s “holy war” to subjugate or eliminate non-Muslims.<sup>42</sup>

### Similar Patterns

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, as the Arab horde moved northward behind the retreating Byzantine forces, some non-Chalcedonian Christian groups, who viewed Islam as the “rod of God’s anger” intended “to deliver [them] from the Byzantines,”<sup>43</sup> felt relief from what they considered an oppressive former regime. On the other hand, the “Byzantine polemicists saw Islam as a ‘Satanic plot’ to destroy Christian Faith.”<sup>44</sup> Some of the sources cited religious devotion by the invaders and some cited brutality and godlessness. Overall, there seemed to be a sense of ambivalence and unpreparedness. At first the new regime ruled from a distance and made light economic and civil demands. This further pleased the non-Chalcedonian Christians. However, as the Muslims gained more power, the suppression of Christian rights increased. In time, Christians were brutally persecuted, churches and Bibles were burned, crosses were banned and public preaching was denied. As the number of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibrahim, *Crucified Again*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> 'Christianity and Islam' from Oxford Islamic Studies Online", November 13, 2014 <http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/198>. (Sahas, 23)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (Gaudeul, vol. 1, 65).

Muslims in the general population grew, many of the remaining Christians were faced with three choices: convert, submit and pay, or die.

We see many of these same patterns reappearing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially in the Middle East. For example, as ISIS has been on the move in Iraq, they have been greeted with open arms by their fellow Sunni Muslims who hold disdain for the present U.S. built Iraqi government. As ISIS gains more power, there is greater suppression of the rights of Christians and those they consider to be Muslim “infidels.” Christians are faced with horrendous persecution as they face torture, rape, crucifixion, and beheadings. Their churches are burned, crosses are banned, and public proclamation of their Christian faith brings swift martyrdom. In the end they are given three choices: convert, submit and pay, or die (or flee before this happens). With meticulous and brutal conviction, parts of the Middle East are being “cleansed” of any Christian presence; a presence that has survived for almost 2,000 years.

### **Solutions**

Are there any ways to break this pattern and bring true peace to the Middle East? The growth of “power Islam” seems to catapult forward when there is a political vacuum to fill. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the retreat of the Byzantine forces left the Levant unguarded. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a retreat of colonial forces that had provided modernization and movement toward Westernization. While the colonial forces were in control, the Middle Eastern Christians had been able to experience a type of “Golden Period” where the *dhimmi* status was lifted and they were able to build churches, receive better opportunities for education, and make advances in

society. However, the colonial forces turned the power back over to the Muslims, and in a relatively short time the rejection of western values provided an impetus to revive a socio-economic-religious worldview based on 7th century Islam. Because Islam is a theocracy, the success of “power Islam” has encouraged militant groups to believe that God is on their side. This, in turn, has fueled their belief that they have a mandate by God to subdue the rest of the world (the *Dar al-Harb*, or “house of war”) under the *Dar al-Islam*, or the “house of Islam” (or “house of submission” to God).

Some believe that a secularization of Islamic countries needs to take place, involving the “separation of mosque and state.” With this type of separation, the state would protect the freedom of the religion and the religion would respect the role of the state. Then, when there is proper balance between these “two worlds,” there can be peace. However, a theocratic nation will always be at war with the secular state, and a Muslim nation.

What should be our Christian response? First of all, Christians should love Muslims because they have also been made in the image of God and need his salvation. We also need to realize that Islam, itself, is the problem, not Muslims. In order to confront heresy, we need to shine the full light of truth on error. If we deny that there is a problem, then we will never resolve it. Thus, our best defense is to construct a proper apologetic approach. First of all, we need to seek to understand Islam. Christians need to be informed of the basic teachings of Islam. Secondly, we need to learn how to defend key Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity, the deity of

Christ, the crucifixion, and biblical authenticity. Thirdly, we need to learn how to refute error with gentleness and respect.

This conflict with “power Islam” may last a long time, especially since the foundation of their actions is firmly sanctioned in the Qur’an, the Hadith and the Sunnah of Muhammad. However, we also know that God has a plan for his nations, and we need to realize that in the last two decades more Muslims have come to Christ than in the preceding 1400 years. This is why we need to hold fast to the Word of God, preach boldly, and always be prepared to give an answer for what we believe.