

Comparing and contrasting Christianity and Islam

Introduction:

[Judaism](#), [Christianity](#), and [Islam](#) are three closely related religions and are often linked together as *Abrahamic religions*.

However, their many points of similarity are no guarantee that their followers can get along. Most of the serious religiously motivated conflicts, mass crimes against humanity and [genocides](#) in the 20th century have been between Muslims and Christians. This has included genocides in Bosnia Herzegovina, East Timor, and the Sudan, as well as serious conflicts in Cyprus, Kosovo, Macedonia, and the Philippines. As of early 2011, two of these conflicts (Sudan and Philippines) are still active. However, a [plebescite in Sudan](#) during 2011-JAN may end the slaughter by separating the predominately Muslim north from the Christian/Animist south. Three other past conflicts are relatively inert only because of peacekeepers on the ground; however, the hatred continues.

It is difficult to compare Christianity to any other religion, because there is such a wide range of beliefs and practices among [various wings of Christianity](#): [Roman Catholicism](#), [Eastern Orthodox](#) churches, the Anglican communion, and the tens of thousands of Protestant faith groups. Some commentators have suggested that Christianity consists of a number of different religions which share little more than the Bible and the name of their religion. Protestant Christianity is obviously divided into at least [liberal and conservative wings](#) -- divisions which hold few beliefs in common. Some of the descriptions below will thus necessarily be somewhat simplistic and lacking in precision.

Similarly, Islam is divided into many different traditions including Sunni, Shi'ite, Sufi, and many minority groups.

To complicate matters further, religious practices and beliefs throughout the world are influenced by many factors:

- What the religion's holy book says.
- How passages in the book is interpreted by theologians and clergy
- The impact of scientific findings.
- Individuals' personal experience, and above all:
- **The culture in which the religion is embedded.**

These factors vary from country to country. This leads to selective reading of the Holy Books to find justification for local practices.

[...]

Note on Attributing guilt and responsibility:

One of the themes running through some holy books is that of "scapegoating." ⁵ This is the concept that guilt and punishment can be transferred from those responsible for an evil act, to others who are innocent of that act. This theme is rarely -- if ever -- discussed in religious homilies or sermons. Yet it seems fundamentally unjust and evil according to every moral code that I have seen. By not holding perpetrators directly responsible for their actions, innocent people become marginalized and denigrated.

For example:

- When some Muslims think of Christianity in America, they think of Pastor Terry Jones of *Dove World Outreach Center* in Florida as a typical Christian. He advocates burning copies of the Qur'an.
- When some Christians think of Islam in the Middle East, they think of Osama Bin Laden or Musab al-Zarqawi, leaders of Al-Qaeda, as typical Muslims.

They confuse the beliefs or practices of an individual or a small minority of believers for the entire religion. As one example, in the minds of some Americans, responsibility for 9/11 terrorist attack on New York City and Washington has spread from 19 radical, violent, fundamentalist Muslims and their Al-Qaida handlers to all 1.6 billion followers of Islam.

We ask our visitors to consider two items when reading this section of our website -- and for that matter all of the other 6,000 essays:

- The irrationality of blaming innocent persons for the sins of a tiny minority within their group. One of this web site's mottos is: "When some people deviate from reality, others are often hurt."
- When one refers to any religion or faith group/tradition/denomination within a religion, we are generally referring to more than the beliefs and teachings of its founder. The culture in which the religion developed has generally had a major impact as well. So, for example, the four main versions of Sharia law are all based on the Qur'an -- and to a lesser degree on the Hadith. However, they have been profoundly influenced by the cultures in which Islam grew.

[...]

About the religions themselves:

Name of the religion:	Christianity	Islam
Meaning of the name:	Follower of Christ (a Greek word meaning Messiah).	Submission to the will of God.
Name of a believer:	Christian.	Muslim.
Date of founding:	circa 30 CE . ¹	622 CE. ²
Name of founder(s):	Yeshua of Nazareth (aka Jesus Christ, ³ and Paul.	Most religious historians credit Muhammad (pbuh) as the founder. ³ However, Muslims generally regard Islam as dating back to the time of creation
% of world's population as followers:	33%.	20%.
Worldwide growth rate in numbers of members ⁴	2.3%/year.	2.9%/yr.
Growth rate of the religion as a % of the world's population:	About 0.0%. Percentage has been static for decades.	Increase of about 0.6%/yr.
Estimated year when Islam will become the most popular world religion:	As early as 2023 CE (if above numbers are valid and remain stable) to as late as 2200 CE (as estimated by some religious futurists)	
% of U.S. population as followers:	2008 ARIS study estimates 76%, and declining.	2008 ARIS study estimates 0.6%; some Muslim groups estimate 6 million (2%).
Major traditions or denominations:	Roman Catholic , Eastern Orthodox , Anglican, Protestant, and others.	Shi'ite, Sunni, Sufi. (Sufi is a mystical tradition).

Notes:

1. The Christian church is normally considered to have begun at Pentecost, 50 days after Christians believe that Jesus was executed. Unfortunately, the year, month, and day of his death are all unknown.
2. Most religious historians view Islam as having been founded in 622 CE. However, many if not most of the followers of Islam believe that:

- Islam existed before Muhammad (pbuh) was born.
- The origins of Islam date back to the creation of the world.

- Muslims traditionally acknowledge respect for Muhammad, Jesus and other prophets (peace be upon them) by adding this phrase or an abbreviation "(pbuh)" after their names.
- Greg H. Parsons, Executive Director, "U.S. Center for World Mission," Pasadena, CA; quoted in Zondervan News Service, 1997-FEB-21.

Beliefs:

Name of the religion:	Christianity	Islam
Concept of deity:	Most believe in the Trinity; three persons in a single Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	God (Allah) is one and indivisible. They believe in a strict monotheism. " <i>Allah</i> " means God in Arabic.
Status of Yeshua of Nazareth (Jesus Christ):	Generally considered the Son of God, worshiped as God; one person of the Trinity.	Very highly respected as the second-last prophet; second only to Muhammad in importance.
Conception/birth of Yeshua:	Conservatives: virgin conception . Liberals: conventional birth.	Virgin conception.
Death of Yeshua:	Authorized by Pontius Pilate and executed by Roman Army circa 30 CE by crucifixion.	He was neither killed, nor suffered death. Muslims believe that he ascended alive into heaven. ¹
Yeshua's location	Ascended into Heaven	Ascended into Heaven
Identity of "another helper" or "comforter" *	Holy Spirit	Muhammad
Second coming of Jesus	Conservatives: expect in near future. Liberals: varied beliefs.	Anticipate his second coming in the future.
Status of Adam:	Disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. With Eve, is responsible for original sin that affects all of their descendents down to all persons alive today.	As with Christianity, Adam is believed to have been tempted by Satan and disobeyed God. However, God forgave him for his sins. Muslims have no concept of original sin. Adam is considered a prophet.
Main holy book:	Bible, consisting of Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures ²	Qur'an ³
Original languages:	Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek.	Arabic.
Status of the holy book:	Conservatives: the inerrant Word of God. Liberals: a historical document.	God's word and final revelation, dictated by angel Gabriel to Muhammad. He passed it on in oral form. A slightly imperfect copy of a perfect copy in Paradise.
Additional guidance:	Writings of the leaders of the early Church. For Roman Catholics : church tradition.	The Hadith -- sayings and stories of Muhammad (pbuh), his companions and relatives.
Ethic of reciprocity (Golden rule):	"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Matthew 7:12	"Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." Fourth Hadith of an-Nawawi 13
A baby's status at birth	Various views. One common view is that a baby is born with a sin nature, separated from God.	All babies are born in a pure state of submission to Allah. However, as they mature they are often taught other beliefs.
Life after death:	Either Heaven or Hell . Catholics believe in Purgatory as a third, temporary, state.	Paradise or Hell.
Basis of determining who goes to Heaven or Paradise:	There is no consensus in Christianity. Different faith groups hold various diverse beliefs : e.g. some combination of: repentance, trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior, good works, church	Once they reach puberty, his/her account of deeds is opened in Paradise. To attain paradise, at death, their good deeds (helping others, testifying to the truth of God, leading a virtuous life)... must

	sacraments, baptism, avoiding the undefined unforgivable sin , etc.	outweigh their evil deeds.
Confessing sins:	Roman Catholic: to God or Jesus, either directly or through a priest; Others: to God or Jesus	To Allah
Probably the most misunderstood term:	<i>Immaculate Conception:</i> Roman Catholics believe that the conception of the Virgin Mary, circa 20 BCE , was without sin. Many incorrectly relate it to Yeshua's' conception.	<i>Jihad:</i> internal, personal struggle towards the attainment of a noble goal. Many incorrectly equate it to " <i>holy war</i> ."

Notes:

- Most religious historians view Islam as having been founded in 622 CE. However, many if not most of the followers of Islam believe that:
 - Islam existed before Muhammad (pbuh) was born.
 - The origins of Islam date back to the creation of the world.
- The books included in the Bible differ among Christian faith groups. The Roman Catholic Church includes the Apocrypha; most other Christian denominations do not. Members of the approximately 100 faith groups in the [LDS Restorationist movement](#), including *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (the Mormons) add other holy books, including the Book of Mormon. Christian Scientists consider Mary Baker Eddy's book "*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*" to be a major resource.
- Muslims generally believe that the Qur'an is the literal word of God, as dictated to Muhammad over an interval of 23 years. The copy of the Qur'an in Paradise is the only book in the universe that is considered free of tahrif (error). There are four additional books:
 - The Suhuf-i-Ibrahim (Scrolls of Abraham/Ibrahim) which have been lost.
 - The Tawrat (the Pentateuch from the Hebrew Scriptures) which many Muslims believe were altered by ancient Hebrews.
 - The Zabur which many Muslims believe are the Psalms from the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - The Injil (the Gospels; the words of Jesus). Muslims believe that this consists of the entire Christian Scriptures (New Testament), or perhaps only the four canonical Gospels. They also have been distorted and corrupted over time. Other Muslims believe that the Injil is not a book, but a group of teachings.

Practices:

Name of the religion:	Christianity	Islam
Current interpretation of the Holy Book:	Ranges from statements of the Pope in Roman Catholicism to resolutions at conventions among Protestants.	Learned scholars in various countries. There is no single spokesperson or authoritative group.
Name of worship center:	Church, cathedral.	Mosque.
Main day of worship:	Sunday; Saturday for some.	Friday.
Church and state:	Largely considered separate. Most predominately Christian countries are democracies	Integrated. Most predominately Muslim countries are dictatorships.
Law	Generally restricted to legal matters.	Covers both moral and legal matters.
Legislation	Prerogative of the people	Prerogative of God
Use of statues of deity, saints,	Common in some denominations; absent or forbidden in others.	Absolutely forbidden. Statues and pictures are considered a very serious form of idolatry.

prophets, etc:		
Main holy days :	Most Christians celebrate at least Christmas, Easter, and associated holy days.	Ashura; Mawlid; lunar month of Ramadan; Eid al-Fitr; Eid al-Adha.
Status of women; sexism:	Variable. Conservatives & liberals differ greatly in the allowed roles for women in the family, employment, and church.	Strongly affected by cultural traditions. Women are severely oppressed in some countries.
Status of sexual minorities (lesbians , gays , bisexuals , transgender persons , transsexuals):	Variable; ranges from limitations on the right to marry and other rights to acceptance of same-sex marriage	Variable; ranges from being driven underground into hiding, to execution.
Marriages forbidden:	Inter-faith marriages, in the Eastern Orthodox church. Marriages between conservative Christians and others, within conservative Christianity.	A Muslim woman may not be married (or remained married) to a non-Muslim man.
Racism:	Promoted by the LDS church until 1978. Still supported by Christian Identity , KKK, and other Christian fringe groups. Officially rejected by almost all other denominations. Remains widespread in the U.S. May be increasing since the election of President Obama who is bi-racial.	Officially rejected by all Islamic movements. ¹
Reaction to apostasy (leaving the faith due to religious conversion):	Prior to 1792, the end of the " <i>burning times</i> ," <i>execution was common. Today, with the separation of church and state, people are free to change or abandon their religion without government reaction.</i>	Traditionally, death to the apostate . This is still practiced by some predominately Muslim countries. More commonly, apostates are occasionally murdered by friends, family, or a mob.
Historical treatment of Jewish people in Muslim countries (Prior to World War 1):	Prolonged and widespread anti-Judaism, anti-semitism, oppression, and mass murder .	Additional taxation, because Jews were not required to serve in the military, but otherwise general tolerance.
Recent treatment of Jewish people:	Lessening of anti-semitism from historical levels, and gradual support of Israel, particularly since World War II.	Massive opposition and physical attacks since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the occupation of Palestine.
Relations with state of Israel since 1948	Widespread support for Israel among religious conservatives. Criticism among some liberals concerning Israel's treatment of Muslims.	Widespread rejection of Israel. Discrimination, suicide bombing, etc. practiced. An exception is Turkey, a Muslim country that is a secular state.
Basis of calendar :	Gregorian solar calendar. ¹ CE occurred about four to seven years after birth of Jesus.	Many Muslims use Gregorian calendar. Religious events based on the Islamic lunar calendar. ¹ AH occurred in 622 CE, the <i>year of the Hegira</i> when Muhammad traveled from Mecca to Medina.
Most misunderstood practice:	The sacrifice of the Mass, a Roman Catholic ritual. Some Native Americans and others interpreted it as a form of ritual cannibalism.	Female genital mutilation . This is often incorrectly considered to be a religious requirement of Islam. Actually it is cultural tradition common in some countries of Northern Africa. It is unknown in many Muslim countries.

Note:

1. One exception is the *Nation of Islam* which promotes a black supremacist ideology. For example, leader Louis Farrakhan stated that "*White people are potential humans: they haven't evolved yet.*" (Philadelphia Inquirer, 2000-MAR-18). However, most Muslims do not consider the *Nation of Islam* to be part of Islam, because of its unique beliefs about God, humanity and the rest of the universe.

Definitions of the term "Islamophobia"

"Islamophobia" has many shades of meaning and includes many forms of negative reactions towards Islam and Muslims.

We define "[Islamophobia](#)" as

"Fear and/or hatred of Muslims, or of the religion of Islam, and/or a desire to limit the civil liberties of Muslims.

This word corresponds to sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia in areas related to gender, race, sexual orientation and nationality. It corresponds to anti-semitism and Christianophobia in areas related to Judaism and Christianity.

It is often exhibited by a person attributing the actions of a few extreme, violent, fundamentalist Muslim terrorists to the entire population of Muslims or to the religion of Islam."

Similar definitions can be written to refer to:

- Christianophobia (a.k.a. Christophobia) -- negative reaction towards Christianity and Christians; ¹
- Anti-semitism ² -- negative reaction toward Judaism and Jews;
- [Homophobia](#) -- negative reactions towards homosexuality and lesbians, gays and bisexuals;
- [Transphobia](#) -- negative reactions towards transgender persons and transsexuals; or
- Against any other identified group, whether the distinction is based on race, skin color, disability, religion, gender, nationality, language, etc.

Some people seem to need to hate others in order to increase their own feelings of self-worth. Others seem to have a need to divide humanity into two groups: those like themselves, who are good, and "the others," who are evil or at least suspect.

A Google search for definitions using the search string: **define: islamophobia** returned six definitions. Note that some definitions refer to beliefs, while others refer to attitudes and actions:

- Prejudice against Muslims." at wordnetweb.princeton.edu/
- "Islamophobia is prejudice or discrimination against Islam or Muslims. The term seems to date back to the late 1980s, but came into common usage after the [September 11, 2001 attacks](#) in the United States." at: en.wikipedia.org/
- "The fear or hatred of Islam or Muslims," at: en.wiktionary.org/
- "Fear of Muslims, hatred of Muslims, or a desire to limit the civil liberties of Muslims. This word corresponds to sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia in areas related to gender, race, sexual orientation and nationality." at: www.translationdirectory.com/
- "Fear or dislike of Muslims or Islamic culture," at: www.fearsandphobias.com.au/
- "The expression of hatred, negative stereotypes or racist acts towards individual Muslims or followers of the Islamic faith." at: www.racetoeducate.com/

Where does valid criticism of Islam end and Islamophobia start:

That is an important question with no clear answer:

-

Notes:

1. A Google search on 2010-SEP-09 found about 100,000 hits for "Christianophobia" and 32,000 for "Christophobia." We will use the former term because it is more popular and because "Christophobia" could be interpreted as meaning the fear or loathing of Yeshua of Nazareth (a.k.a. [Jesus Christ](#)).
 2. The correct capitalization is most often "anti-Semitism." However, since the term "semitic" refers to a language and not a people or a religion, we write the term in lower case on this website.
-

This document source: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/>

Copyright © 2001 to 2011 by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance

Originally written: 2001-AUG-4

Latest update: 2011-MAR-11

Author: B.A. Robinson