

The Sword in the Islamic World View

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Abstract

The sword was essentially an important constituent in world culture. For many Muslims, the sword is a symbol of law. Therefore, the sword and power which were means of spreading Islam is not a source of shame for Muslims; rather it is one of its strengths and virtues. Islam was spread worldwide in a hundred years by proof and evidence before rising swords in battle fields. In Islamic philosophy, Islam was spread by proof and evidence, in the case of those who listened to the message and responded to it. And it was spread by strength and the sword in the case of those who stubbornly resisted, until they had no choice and had to submit to the new reality. The West has widely believed that the surge of conversion to Islam was made only by the sword. Modern scholars do not accept this idea while the teachings of the Qur'an are explicit in support of the freedom of conscience.

Keywords: Muhammad, Islam, The Glorious Qur'an, sword, conversion, Islamic philosophy

The Sword in World Civilizations

The sword has its symbolic meaning in the world cultures. It has a special place in the history of various religious, cultures and nations. The sword has also been a part of social and cultural traditions of many different communities. The practice of giving a sword as a mark of respect or in recognition of one's exceptional contribution towards the society is as old as the sword itself. References pertaining to the sword can be found in the history of the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Japanese, and other national and religious groups. For instance, the use of the sword in Chinese culture is part of wisdom. For a Sikh, "Kirpan" or a ceremonial short sword or dagger is an article of faith. For an initiated Sikh, wearing of a Kirpan is obligatory. An initiated Sikh, not wearing a Kirpan, would be in breach of his faith. The Hindu goddess Durga is shown carrying several weapons but a raised sword in her right hand, is the most striking feature of her pictures. This symbolic action sacrifices physical bondage to release a path to ethereal (enlightened) freedom. In Buddhism the sword, symbolism deals with discrimination of thought. In this light, swords cut away ignorance. In Judaism, the Israeli Prophet Moses used the sword to fight the King in Palestine. The Christian sword deals with protection, righteousness, and justice. Archangel Michael is depicted in Christian art holding a sword (also with scales) to reinforce the concept of truth, purity, equanimity, and the justness revealed in the light of Christ. Furthermore, as a symbol of strength or a symbol of balance, it should be clear that the sword encapsulates a myriad of meanings from which to choose.

Jesus Christ has been quoted by Matthew as saying, "*I have come not to bring peace to the earth, but a sword!*" (Matthew 10:34). This is one of the controversial statements reported about Jesus in the Bible. The saying has been interpreted in several ways. Its main significance is that it is often offered as evidence that Jesus advocated violence—a view that is repugnant to many branches of Christianity, such as the peace churches.

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Many Christians believe that the sword is a metaphor for ideological conflict and that Jesus is not advocating physical violence, especially since he talks of division in a family. Some may interpret this passage to mean that Jesus advocated physical violence under some circumstances, but this interpretation directly contradicts his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and many of his other parables. The early seven hundred years of Christian expansion in northern Europe is that the work was mainly done by the sword, in the interests of kings and tyrants, who supported it, as against the resistance of their subjects, who saw in the Church an instrument for their subjugation. Christianity, in short, was as truly a religion of the sword as Islam was. The sword was to shorten the pride of the heathens to prevail. Comparing Jesus to Muhammad, Jesus did not complete his mission to mankind.

Therefore, many Christian communities believed the world was about to end, that Jesus was going to return shortly, and he would destroy the evil forces and usher in a Kingdom of God in which the believers would rejoice and live happily. In essence, they believed that Jesus would use the sword. There is no sense in pretending this claim of the conversion of the Vikings "Be Christian or die." It might have been an exceptional missionary tactic for some time. Cromwell's Inauguration was by the Sword and the Bible. For a stable religious prominence, the sword was the method of choice among Christian rulers and missionaries. The spread of Islam stands in contrast to the actions of the followers of Christianity, which since the time of the Emperor Constantine have made liberal use of the sword – often basing their conduct on Biblical verses. This was especially true of the colonization of South America and Africa, where native peoples were systematically wiped-out or forced to convert. William E. Phipps, in his work *Muhammad and Jesus* (1996), concludes that the teachings of Jesus and Muhammad are prophets of the same family.

The use of force was a must in the conventional laws of the Middle Ages. Hence Allah, the Creator, says in the Qur'an: "*Indeed We have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance (justice) that mankind may keep up justice*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 57:25). The purpose behind sending the Messengers and revealing the Books was so that mankind might keep up justice with regard to the rights of Allah and the rights of His creation. In Makkah, the growth of the new religion was not easy for Arab pagans. The great success of Muhammad's life had been affected by sheer moral force, without a stroke of the sword. Prophet Muhammad prevailed in Arabia. According to the Arab chronicles, the battle of Badr was one of the most decisive battles of Islamic history. The swords of the Islamic conquests proved that most of the Islamic army was not thinking about gain or profits; they were fighting for monotheism.

The Symbolism of Sword in Islam

The image of sword in the flag of many Islamic countries up to these days is a symbol of power. The prominent American frieze in the U.S. Supreme Court portrays Prophet Muhammad holding the Holy Qur'an and wielding a sword known to Muslims as the *Dhu'l-Faqir*. The stone sculptures of eighteen lawgivers, from Hammurabi to John Marshall, are meant to signify the law's foundation in a stable society. The portrait includes Moses with the Ten Commandments. Prophet Muhammad is between Charlemagne and Justinian. He is shown with the Holy Qur'an, in one hand and a sword in the other. Some other traditions represent him as moving along the ranks with a drawn sword (Margoliouth, 1905: 269). Prophet Muhammad never claimed to be divine, and he never attributed supernatural powers to himself. The sword of Muhammad is the sword of the revelation of God.

The unambiguous and uncompromising belief in the Unity, the Greatness, the Wisdom of God, the Creator of the universe, in Islam is unparalleled among other religions. Sir Thomas Arnold observes that "the of the unity of God... has always been proclaimed in the Qur'an with grandeur, majesty, an invariable purity and with a note of pure conviction which is hard to find surpassed outside the pale of Islam. A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities and so accessible to the ordinary understanding might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvelous power of winning its way into the consciences of men" (Arnold, 1913: 89). The Qur'an was a great challenge to the early Arabs. They were fascinated by the verses of the Qur'an and they confessed that no man could ever have uttered these verses. The Qur'an is powerful in words and statements that play the different roles which language plays.

The influence of Qur'anic informational power occurs through such means as rational argument, persuasion, or factual data. The Qur'an makes information into power by giving it to others who need it, by keeping it to themselves, by organizing it in some way, by increasing it, or even by falsifying it.

Muhammad was sent with the power of divine words of the Qur'an. He was asked by God to deliver his speech through communication which can change someone's mind, physically. The words of the Qur'an do not disappear from memory. They and their meanings remain. The words of the Qur'an crystallise the Arab thought. The speech of God makes the listeners' thoughts recoverable. The Arab pagans finally broke down their opposition and they confessed that the Qur'an has no similar production in the world.

The systems and laws that control their lives are all made up by human beings. In this case each idea and each system has the right to live safely within its own borders so long as it does not transgress the borders of others, so the various ideas and laws can co-exist and not try to destroy one another. But when there is a divine system and law, and alongside it there are human systems and laws, then the matter is fundamentally different, and the divine law has the right to remove the barriers and free people from enslavement to human beings. Islamic law dictated how to use the sword and Muhammad worked within boundaries of the human rights and the international law in the Middle Ages. Prophet Muhammad did not deny the use of force in his mission to convey the message of God to mankind. This force was used with the people of other prophets such as the force of Solomon, David and the God's natural force of flood with the people of Noah. The Prophet said: "I have been sent ahead of the Hour with the sword so that Allah will be worshipped alone, and my provision has been placed in the shade of my sword, and humiliation has been decreed for those who go against my command, and whoever imitates a people is one of them" (*Musnad Ahmad*, no.4869; *Saheeh Al-Jaami*, no.2831).

Among the most widely believed myths about Islam in the West today is the myth of forcible conversion to Islam. Many Westerners do believe that Islam is so widespread in the world today simply because of an unjust holy war carried out by the early Muslims to convert non-Muslims to Islam. Non-Muslims were offered the freedom to choose either Islam or death. The otherwise problematic fact is that so many people converted to Islam when it was, clearly, an inferior or even completely wicked religion. Charles M. Doughty states that "the sword is the key of their imagined paradise. The unwarlike but frenetic Arabians, inflamed with the new greediness of both worlds, ran down like wolves to devour the civil borderlands (Doughty, 1888:379). Ibn Batuta (1304–1369), a Moroccan Muslim explorer, known for his extensive travels, believes that Prophet Muhammad called for the use of the sword in his war against opposing tribes - Christian, Jewish and other Arab - in Arabia, when he was building his state; but that was a political act, not a religious one; basically a fight for territory, not for the spreading of the faith.³ Prophet Muhammad advocated the use of the sword for achieving political and religious objectives.

Islamic Law allows the use of the sword

The Islamic philosophy of life lies in one's resigned submission to Allah, God the Creator. The purpose is that all religion should be for Allah alone, and that the word of Allah should be supreme. The word of Allah is a comprehensive phrase that refers to His words that are contained in His Book. Allah says: "*And We brought forth iron wherein is mighty power (in matters of war), as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test who it is that will help Him (His religion) and His Messengers in the unseen*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 27:25). Therefore, whoever deviates from the Book is to be brought back with iron, i.e. by force. Hence, the soundness of the religion is based on the Qur'an and the sword. It was narrated that Jaabir ibn 'Abd-Allah said: "The Messenger of Allah commanded us to strike with this, meaning the sword, whoever turns away from this, meaning the Qur'an. Ibn al-Qayyim, a ninth century great Islamic scholar, says that Allah sent the Prophet with the guiding Book and the conquering sword, ahead of the Hour, so that Allah alone would be worshipped with no partner or associate, and his provision was placed beneath the shade of his sword and spear. Allah has established the religion of Islam with proof and evidence, and with the sword and spear, both together and inseparable (Ibn Al-Qayyim: 2005:18).

³ Sir Thomas Walker Arnold. *The preaching of Islam: a history of the propagation of the Muslim faith*, p. 212.

Abu Bakr, the first Caliph in Islam, and the ruling elite of the new Islamic state embraced an expansionist policy (Donner, 1981: 251). Islam was the only rival that had met and conquered Christianity on a large scale and thus was the great rival of the Christian faith.

It often gave the opportunity to move from the static and stifling environment of the village to one of the expanding towns which were so typical of the early Islamic world. The Muslim authorities did not force people to convert but the structure of Muslim government did encourage people to make that choice. The ascetic Umar Umayyad Caliph (717-720), stopped the foreign wars and conquests. To his son, who asked for stern measures to root out evil, he replied, "That means the sword, and there are no good reforms that can be accomplished by the sword" (Payne, 1990:140). Although many Muslims deny the Orientalists' accusations that Islam was spread by the sword, great Islamic scholars approve the use of force but not violence. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (1263–1328) says: The defeatists among the Muslims come out to defend Islam, and they want to exonerate Islam of this so-called lie, so they deny that Islam was spread by the sword, and they say that *jihad* is not prescribed in Islam, except in the case of self-defence. There is no such thing in Islam as taking the initiative in fighting in their view. This goes against what the Muslim scholars have stated, let alone the fact that it goes against the Qur'an and Sunnah. (*Ibn Taymiyah*, 2005: 28/263)

Many Muslim scholars and thinkers believe in the power of sword to save law and order as the Arab Bedouins of the desert believe in the proverb, "If there were no sword there would be no law of Muhammad." The Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was of the view that war had existed in society since 'Creation'. Man, by his very nature, was warlike, motivated to fight for selfish interests or emotion.⁴ In the battles of Badr, Uhud and Tabuk, the responsibility was much more on every Muslim to present his services as a combatant (Crone, 1987:456). Moreover, in the declaration of the contemporary committee of religious affairs, Fatawa Al-Lajnah Al-Da'imah, "Islam was spread by proof and evidence, in the case of those who listened to the message and responded to it. And it was spread by strength and the sword in the case of those who stubbornly resisted, until they had no choice and had to submit to the new reality".⁵ In *Futuh al-Buldan* of Baladhuri, Prophet Muhammad said: "All cities or districts were conquered by force, but Al Medina was conquered by the Koran" (Hitti, 1916:21).

The Qur'an is the first juristic source. The Qur'anic verses had been revealed in specific circumstances and it is not easy to illustrate these verses to verify the force purposes (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 27:25). Combat is ordered in the Qur'an, only under very specific and limited conditions and it is nothing more than what would today call "The War on Terrorism." Some Orientalists depict Islam as a religion of the sword and violence. They describe Islam as being powerful enough as the only option for Non-Muslims under its control would not be whether to accept Islam or reject it. It was rather to accept Islam at best, or to face death at worst. Orientalists illustrate from the Qur'an that killing is Allah's instructions: "*Fight and slay the pagans (non-Muslims) wherever you find them.*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 9:5). They add that according to the Qur'an there should not be any other religion besides Islam in an Islamic country: "*If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him; and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost.*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 3:85).

In the Islamic doctrine, war is approved if the other refuses to open his land for Islamic teaching or to have truce and pay tribute: "*Fight those who do not believe in God or the Last Day, and who do not forbid what has been forbidden by God and His Messenger [Muhammad], and those among the People of the Book who do not acknowledge the religion of truth until they pay tribute [jizya], after they have been brought low*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 9:29). This verse, and others like it, makes it clear that the People of the Book (that is Christian and Jews who have revealed scriptures) should be spared as long as they pay tribute and acknowledge their position as *second class citizens* (Revise). On the other hand, the poll tax is not collected from the weak and poor. In his message to the people of Hira, Khaled Ibn Al-Walid, a companion of the Prophet, said:

⁴ As cited in Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (1955) p.70.

⁵ Permanent Committee of Creeds in Saudi Arabia 12/14, Fatwa no. 5441. See <http://islamqa.info/en/ref/5441>

When a person is too old to work or suffers a handicap, or when he falls into poverty, he is free from the dues of the poll tax; his sustenance is provided by the Moslem Exchequer.⁶ The combative verses, especially (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 9:5) cited above therefore represent the final Muslim view on Holy War.

Patricia Crone states that the famous Verse of the Sword is directed against a particular group accused of oath-breaking and aggression and accepts those polytheists who remained faithful. Crone states that this verse seems to be based on the same above-mentioned rules. Here also it is stressed that one must stop when they do (Crone, 1989:456). The Prophet's conduct of war is similar to the international ethics of war. During his life, Prophet Muhammad gave various injunctions to his forces. The most important of these were summarized by Prophet Muhammad's companion, Abu Bakr, in the form of ten rules for the Muslim army: Stop, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Kill neither a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone.—Abu Bakr, (Aboul-Enein and Zuhur, 2004: 22)

These norms were honoured by the second Caliph, Umar, during whose reign (634–644) significant Muslim conquests took place (Nadvi, 2000:519). This viewpoint was also honoured during the Crusades, as embodied by sultans such as Saladin and al-Kamil. For instance, after al-Kamil defeated the Franks during the Crusades, Oliverus Scholasticus praised the Islamic laws of war, remarking how al-Kamil provided the defeated Frankish armed forces with food: Who could doubt that such goodness, friendship, and charity come from God? Men whose parents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, had died in agony at our hands, whose lands we took, whom we drove naked from their homes, revived us with their own food when we were dying of hunger and showered us with kindness even when we were in their power (Weeramantry: 1997: 136). The sword in the Islamic civilization is a symbol of holy war. It aimed to spoil the philosophy of the gods of the others. Islam is not only a religion of spirituality. It is a religion of practice like *Jihad*. Undoubtedly taking the initiative in fighting has a great effect in spreading Islam and bringing people into the religion of Allah in crowds. Hence the enemies of Islam fear *Jihad*.

The Philosophy of Jihad in Islam

The holy war particularly as understood in the use of the expression: *jihad fi-sabil Allah* – means fighting in the way of God, or for His sake (Lane, 1817: 473-474). Modern scholarship, in accordance with traditional Islamic jurisprudence, has generally treated *jihad* in the context of military action as the one form of war which is permissible in principle in Islam; as the instrument of Islam's universal mission and, if need be, in the defense of Islam; and as an individual duty and collective obligation upon the community of Islam. Among modern Muslims, this subject has been one of great sensitivity since the accusations that Islam "converted by the sword" and is little more than a "warrior's cult" lacking spiritual and ethical depth pervaded so much of the polemical literature largely produced by Christian missionaries in the 19th and early 20th centuries writers who were often closely associated in ultimate outlook if not in person to many of the modern Western scholars of Islamic Studies."⁷

⁶ Mustafa Akyol 2004, 'Muslim Jurists on POWs and Non-Combatants', in *FrontPageMagazine.com* dated October 8, 2004 at <<http://www.FrontPage.com>> accessed on 25 July 2005.

⁷ See as recent an example as Samuel M Zwemer. , "The Sword of Muhammad and Ali," .*Moslem World*, XXI (April, 1931), pp. 109-121. See Moulavi Cheragh Ali, *A Critical Exposition of the Popular jihad* (Karachi: Karimsons, 1977, reprint of the original 1885 Calcutta edition), for an anthology-like collection of extracts from the work of Orientalists and / or missionaries hostile to Islam.

This sensitivity is not only a factor in the consciousness of some modern Muslims and reflected in their political thought as it bears upon jihad (and as such shall be surveyed by this study), but it has also hindered the efforts of modern Muslim scholars as well as political writers in seeking the essence (and thereby the significance) of jihad within traditional Muslim consciousness, acceptable to whatever fashions of contemporary Western thought, be it the pacifist or dynamic evangelical witness of rationalist Victorian Protestantism that seems to have weighed so heavily upon Muslims receiving modern education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries or the more recent requirement of a "revolutionary ideology."⁸ The very "apparentness" should also be a warning.

Not only, as Leo Strauss observes, because "political philosophy is not the same as political thought in general. Political thought is coeval with political life,"⁹ but because Islam is an all-inclusive social order based directly upon revealed Law. This precludes from the outset, as Ernest L. Fortin notes, "any sphere of activity in which reason could operate independently of the divine Law,"¹⁰ and it is the rationalistic, autonomous aspect of Islamic philosophy that has had the least impact in the formation of Islamic Consciousness" (Nasr, 1976: 49-51). In this context the *jihad* is declared as an instrument for the establishment of an Islamic social order that differentiates between the popular idolatry of Arabia and a position within that social order for peoples possessing sacred scripture:

Fight them until there is no more seditious unbelief and religion is for Allah. If they desist in their unbelief there is no enmity, save against the wrong-doers. That 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. Lo! Allah Is Forgiving, Merciful. Fight against such of those 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" (The Glorious Qur'an, 2:193; 9:5; 9:29).

In these circumstances fighting is a binding, sacred duty on Muslim thought he dislike it, and the Prophet is commanded to exhort the Believers to fight (*The Glorious Qur'an*, 2:126; 8:65-66) which he does in declarations that leave little room for ambiguity as to the uses of jihad as the instrument for an Islamic social order.¹¹

In the West, jihad is one of the few Arabic words which most people believe they understand (Gulam, 2006:188). Jihad is often equated with the use of force and is often inaccurately defined as 'holy war' (Zawati, 2001:13). In reality, the term jihad comes from the Arabic verb '*jihada*', meaning to struggle or exert. *Harb* is the general term used for war. Muslim scholar like Abdulaziz Ibn Baz classifies Jihad in different methods. He says:

Jihad is of various kinds, with one's self, one's wealth, by making *dua*, by teaching and guiding, by helping to do well in any way. The greatest form of jihad is jihad with one's self (i.e., going oneself and fighting), followed by jihad with one's wealth, jihad by speaking out and guiding others. *Dawah* is also part of jihad. But going out oneself to fight in jihad is the highest form. (Fatawa ash-Sheikh Ibn Baz, 7/334, 335)¹² There is some of the evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah. The evidence clearly indicates that the sword is one of the most important means that led to the spread of Islam about the knowledge of the truth in God. Allah says:

For had it not been that Allah checks one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the Name of Allah is mentioned much would surely, have been pulled down. Verily, Allah will help those who help His (Cause). Truly, Allah is All-Strong, All-Mighty (The Glorious Qur'an: 22:40).

⁸ In addition to the above cited work of Cheragh Ali, see also the chapter on jihad in Muhammed Ali, *The Religion of Islam* (Cairo: The Arab Writer Publishers and Printers, n.d.), pp. 545-599; Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (London: Methuen, 1965).

⁹ See Leo Strauss, "Introduction", in L. Strauss and J. Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy*, p.1."

¹⁰ Ernest L. Fortin, "St. Thomas Aquinas", *ibid.*, p.226.

¹¹ See Sahih al-Bukhari, M.M.Khan, trans., 10 vols. (Medina: Islamic University, 1971), Book IV, Chapters 93-102.

¹² See Muhammad Saleh Al-Munajjid (2003-05-12). "Jihad: Not Only Fighting". Living Shari'ah.

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503546772. Retrieved 16 August 2006.)

In another verse, Allah says:

"And if Allah did not check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief. But Allah is full of bounty to the 'Aalameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists)" (The Glorious Qur'an: 2:251). Allah has commanded us to prepare the means of fighting against the unbelievers and frightening them. Allah says: "And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles, artillery) to threaten the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides whom, you may not know but whom Allah does know" (The Glorious Qur'an, 8:60). If Islam was only spread by peaceful means, what would the *kuffaar* have to be afraid of? Of mere words spoken by the tongue? In *al-Saheehayn* it is narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "I have been supported with fear as far as a month's journey." Would the *kuffaar* be afraid of being told, "Become Muslim, but if you do not then you are free to believe and do whatever you want?" or were they afraid of jihad and the imposition of the *jizyah* and being humiliated? That may make them enter Islam so that they may be spared this humiliation.

When the Messenger called people to Islam, his call was accompanied by the sword, and he commanded his leaders to do likewise, so that when the people saw the seriousness of the Muslims in calling people to their religion, that dispelled any confusion (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, No. 4787). Prophet Muhammad initially propagated the religion of Islam by teaching, by preaching, and argument. In the earlier Surahs of the Qur'an, the Prophet is described as a Warner. It is the sword of intellect. The sword conquers the hearts and minds of men and women. The Qur'an says, "Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in approaches that are finest and most gracious (The Glorious Qur'an: 16:125). But when he came to power he also felt conscious of a new authority and sanctioned the use of the sword. Therefore, the doctrine of the sword is as follows:

Know thou that the command of fighting was revealed by degrees, for the Prophet was at first commanded to deliver his message, then to discuss and dispute and endeavor to convince the unbelievers by arguments; then the believers were permitted to fight; then they were commanded to fight, at first at any time, except the sacred months, then absolutely, without any exception.¹³

The holy war must be completely made over before the doctrine of *Jihad* can be eliminated".¹⁴ It would be interesting to compare the teaching of the New Testament with the Qur'anic verse about religious war:

"For not with swords loud clashing,
Nor roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy,
The heavenly Kingdom comes."¹⁵

The Prophet first used the sword to shed the blood of unbelievers in his mission in the battle-field of Badr. At Ohod battle, he received sixteen wounds. He is pictured as the great warrior of early Islam, and is said to have punished infidels by death through fire (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 2005: 88, 2). From the earliest time legends gathered around him, as hero-warrior and saint. In the battle of Siffin, he is said to have killed five hundred and twenty-three men in one day with his sword. Afterwards, extraordinary feats were told of him; how he had severed heads from bodies and hewn bodies in two with his saber, *Dhu'l-Faqar*.¹⁶ So this call to Islam was accompanied by the force of arms. Muslim (3261) narrated that Buraydah, a companion of Prophet Muhammad, said:

¹³ See Ibn `Abidin iii: 237 quoted by F. A. Klein (1985), *The Religion of Islam*. Taylor & Francis Ltd. p. 174.

¹⁴ MacDonald, D. B., (1999a). *Djihad*. In *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. P. J. Bearman, Vol. I. Leiden: Brill, p. 17.

¹⁵ It is a Christian hymn of Pilgrimage and Conflict no. 428, *Lead on, o king eternal*. See Index of *The Book of Common Praise*, Revised, 1938.

¹⁶ See H. J. T. Johnson, "Regalia," in James Hastings, ed., (1951). *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, New York: Scribner's, p.21.

When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) appointed a commander to lead an army or a raiding party, he would advise him to fear Allah with regard to himself and the Muslims with him, then he said: "Fight in the name of Allah and for the sake of Allah. Fight those who disbelieve in Allah, fight but do not steal from the war booty (before it is shared out), betray, or mutilate. Do not kill children. If you meet your enemy of the pagans, call them to three things, and whichever one of them they respond to, accept that from them and leave them alone. Then call them to Islam and if they respond, accept that from them and leave them alone. If they refuse but they pay the *jizyah*, then they have responded to you, so accept that from them, and leave them alone. If they refuse then seek the help of Allah and fight them..."

Therefore, the Messenger of Allah told his commanders to call the unbeliever to Islam whilst wielding their swords over their heads. If they refused to become Muslim then they should pay the *jizyah* with humility. If they refused then there was nothing left for them but the sword – "If they refuse then seek the help of Allah and fight them (*Sahih Muslim*, no.3261). Dr. D. W. Leitz, in rebutting this false charge, based his *Jihad* argument on the Qur'an itself. He said, 'all these arguments, advanced to prove that the purpose of *jihad* was to spread Islam by force, are contradicted by the Qur'an. The Qur'an says that the purpose of *jihad* is to protect mosques, churches, synagogues and cloisters.'¹⁷ Dr Leitz has referred to the Qur'an:

'Permission to fight is granted to those against whom war has been made because they have been wronged. Allah indeed has the power to help them. They are those who have been driven out of their homes because they affirmed that our Lord is Allah. If Allah did not repel the aggression of some by the means of others, then surely cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques—where His name is honored—would be destroyed? (The Glorious Qur'an: 22:40- 41)

The fact that the sword and power were means of spreading Islam is not a source of shame for Islam, rather it is one of its strengths and virtues, because that makes people adhere to that which will benefit them in this world and in the Hereafter. Many people are foolish and lacking in wisdom and knowledge, and if they are left to their own devices, they will remain blinded to the truth, indulging in their whims and desires. Therefore, Allah has prescribed *jihad* in order to bring them back to the truth and to that which will benefit them. Undoubtedly, wisdom dictates that the fool should be prevented from doing that which will harm him, and should be forced to do that which will benefit him. Al-Bukhaari (No. 4557) narrated that Abu Hurayrah, a companion of Prophet Muhammad said: "You (true believers in Islamic Monotheism, and real followers of Prophet Muhammad and his Sunnah) are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind'. He said: "You are the best (i.e., the most beneficial) of people for mankind; you bring them in the chains that are around their necks until they enter Islam" (Sayyid Qutb, 1999: 217-222).

The Sword's Argument in the West

Islam is not only a religion, but it is a political system and a social life. Changes effected in the political or social worlds of a Muslim people are invariably effected at the expense of loyalty to the religion of Islam. As Daniel Vitkus highlights, "Islam was narrowly defined and caricatured as a religion of violence and lust-aggressive *jihad* in this world, and sensual pleasure promised in the next world" (Vitkus, 1999: 217). The Qur'an is precise in its message for every aspect of our lives regardless of nationality, ethnic and cultural origin, gender, or social- economic level. It not only reaches all levels of understanding and intelligence, but takes into account human frailty and guides us to social conduct which allows us to live together in this world with one another with dignity, honesty, and kindness. But it must be practiced according to the teachings of the Qur'an. This is a task which requires constant striving and effort; hence, the importance of constant contact with God through daily prayer. It is a "code of conduct" that is concise, pure, understandable, merciful, and hopeful. It is for these reasons--the simplicity of Islam--that Islam has spread so rapidly through the ages.

¹⁷ See Dr D. W. Lenz, *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, October 1886.

The Qur'an states: "*Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 2:256). Allah instructs Muslims "*Say: the truth from your Lord and let him who will believe and let him who will reject*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 18:29). For Muslims, Islam is the religion of the Truth and the Qur'an is the book of the Truth: "*We sent down the Qur'an in Truth and in Truth has it descended*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 17:105); "*Put your trust in Allah for you are on the path of the manifest Truth*" (*The Glorious Qur'an*: 27:79).

Many people have chosen Islam throughout the more than 1400 years of its history. Islam has penetrated the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, West Africa, East Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan, India, Western China, and the Malayan Archipelago. Islam in all these regions replaced so many other well-established religions: Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Paganism and animism. Islam triumphs over all those religions in so many different places at so many different times. The reasons are very clear. First and foremost, Islam is an amazing blend of simplicity and rationality: a very simple religion yet very rational at the same time. Professor Hodgson has explained the reasons for the popularity of Islam as follows:

Muslims made a personal appeal to people's religious consciousness. On the level of straight argument, they often put forward the populist intelligibility of Islam. Muslims commonly ridiculed, in the name of intellectual good sense, the more mythically convoluted teachings of older traditions. This could seem attractively straightforward to people dissatisfied with taking things on faith from a learned priest whose mysteries they could not comprehend. A single Creator is to be worshipped by each person for himself, on the basis of revelation that had been given to a famous prophet whom millions already acknowledged. This was at once intelligible and plausible (Hodgson, 1974: 196). Sir William Muir, the author of a four-volume biography of Prophet Muhammad, which has been prominent within Orientalist literature since the middle of the nineteenth century, is one of those Orientalists who proved Orientalism as challenging studies. Muir's most important rationale was to convert Muslims to Christianity.

In *The Life of Mahomet* (1858), he wrote on orthodox Islamic biographies of the Prophet, which evidently orchestrated the Christians' dubiety and skepticism that piled upon the Prophet by earlier Orientalists. Sir William Muir says, 'the sword of Mahomet and the Coran are the most fatal enemies of civilization, liberty and truth which the world has yet known' in the nineteenth century' (Muir, 1858:111).

Islam is not fundamentally established by the sword. The legend of Muhammad's propagating Islam only by the sword, which was made popular in Europe during the Crusades, is baseless. In debunking the myth that Islam was "spread by the sword", the (non-Muslim) historian De Lacy O'Leary wrote: History makes it clear, however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myths that historians have ever accepted (O'Leary, 1923:8).

The first historical book known in the England that contained a positive understanding and constructive arguments about Messenger Muhammad is Henry Stubbe's *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism with the Life of Mahomet and a Vindication of Him and His Religion from the Calumnies of the Christians*. Stubbe argues that the teachings of Muhammad are entirely consistent with the laws of nature, just like the original Christian and Jewish teachings in their earlier phases (Stubbe, 1954:183). Moreover, he says that the claim that Muhammad disseminated his teachings by the sword is a calumny; the wars he fought were aimed at re-storing the old, original religion, rather than instituting a new one (Ibid, 192). According to Stubbe, the Prophet Muhammad's teachings were centered on the idea that paganism should be eliminated all over the world, that God is one and has no partners. Stubbe adds that when the Prophet Muhammad sought to end paganism, he never forced anyone to enter Islam. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad himself wrote some letters that sanctioned the protection of Christians and Jews in the Arabian Peninsula (Ibid.).

The idea of the spread of Islam by sword was popularized at the start of English literary imagination in the Restoration period. For instance, in the tragic Oriental play *Ibrahim The Illustrious Bassa*, Sir Roger Boyle (1621-1676) put the words in the mouth of the minister Ibrahim Basha to justify fight to conquer land and booty as holy as urges by 'Our valiant Prophet did by slaughter rise/Conquest a part of our religion' (Cowley, 1905:188).

They try to stick the European image of Muhammad as created his power among Arabs with sword in one hand and Qur'an in the other. In *Count Julian: A Tragedy* (1812), Walter Savage Landor vividly says:

We, whom the prophet sends over many lands,
Love none above another, Heaven assign
Their fields and harvests to our valiant swords,
And it's enough – we love while we enjoy. (I, iv: 26-29)

Washington Irving went a step further. He printed on the title page of one of his books an imaginary painting of the Prophet with a sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other (Welby, 1928:170). Muhammad was obviously innocent. He took up the sword only in self-defense and only when oppression became unbearable:

In the beginning, the Prophet's enemies made life difficult for him and his followers. Therefore, the Prophet asked his followers to leave their homes and migrate to Medina. He preferred migration to fighting his own people, but when oppression went beyond the pale of tolerance, he took up his sword in self-defense. Those who believe religion can be spread by force are fools who know neither the ways of religion nor the ways of the world. They are proud of this belief because they are a long, long way away from the Truth (Irving, 1868:275).

Prophet Muhammad was considered to be the Anti-Christ; a false prophet; a nationalistic charlatan a bombastic egotist; a tyrant; and a sensualist, among other things. Islam, the religion, was seen as nothing more than an aberration--a heresy--of Christianity; it was viewed as the "religion of the sword", and was insultingly termed "Mohammedanism". Unable to accept Islam, the Christians became downright hostile. In their verbal assaults, the Church leaders made full use of techniques such as bias and distortion, misrepresentation, inventing details in order to attack them, etc.

Time has not made things better, unfortunately; the time of the Crusades is long gone, but Christians still cannot accept Islam. For many modern Christians, however, a new approach is being taken to what they consider "the menace" of Islam. Some Orientalists like Muir and Zwemer established their argument of the spread of Islam as a product of violence and force strategy with diffusion to the divine reality that a very poor and illiterate Arab messenger of God became successful in his mission of Prophet hood. The statement of Sir Valentine Chirol is argumentative. He believes that "Islam has always relied on the sword and for thirteen hundred years"¹⁸ the term 'Mahomet' became a bogey to the people of Europe, used by mothers to frighten disobedient children. Moreover, Lawrence E. Browne states that "Incidentally these well-established facts dispose of the idea so widely fostered in Christian writings that the Muslims, wherever they went, forced people to accept Islam at the point of the sword" (Browne, 1944: 00). The statements of Sir William Muir's *Life of Mahomet* can be read in the context of fear of Christian faith. Muir comments about the Prophet's use of the sword as the inevitable penalty for the denial of Islam is against the civilization history of liberty. This attitude of identifying Islam as a code of distrust and violence is obstinately irrational, anti- religious, and evangelic.

The reason behind the offensive presentation and the mentality of the Western men of letters make so many untrue allegations about Prophet Muhammad and Islam, is because most Westerners often perceived Islam as a rival religion. So, in order to maintain Islam phobia, many leading writers started denigration campaigns against Islam and Prophet Muhammad, claiming that Islam was an extremist religion that had nothing to do with Allah's word. The trend which is generally known as Orientalism is but one aspect of Western distortions of Muhammad. K.S. Ramakrishna Rao says that "the theory of Islam and sword, for instance, is not heard now in any quarter worth the name. The principle of Islam, there is no compulsion in religion, is well known" (Rao, 1989:4). Karen Armstrong, a Catholic nun turned Christian theologian remarks that hostility towards Islam in the West is part of the West value system (1992: 42). For Thomas Carlyle, the sword cannot make a faith. Carlyle modified his ideal portrait of the Arabian Prophet in his lecture on the *Hero as Poet*, (2001: 103-4). The famous historian, Thomas Carlyle, in his book "Heroes and Hero worship", refers to this misconception about the spread of Islam:

¹⁸ See *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. I, No. 3, (Mar. 15, 1923).

"The sword indeed, but exactly where will you get your sword? Every new opinion, at its starting up is exactly in a minority of one particular"(Carlyle, 2001: 115). Islam is for sure against war, but when war imposes itself upon you and there is no way out of it, but to eliminate evil and tyrannical forces. Western scholars denounced Islam as a blasphemous faith and it's Prophet Muhammad as the Great Pretender, who had founded a violent religion of the sword in order to conquer the world.

Conclusion

The West is still unprepared to understand the term 'prophet' for Muhammad. Like Professor Forward, many Christian writers prefer not to use this title 'prophet' for Muhammad. As Forward remarks, "Christians deceive themselves when they think that, by calling Muhammad a prophet, they mean the same or even a comparable thing" (Forward, 1997: 120). Therefore, Jomier and Forward, unlike the other contemporary writers such as Watt, Küng, Cragg, and Kerr, regard Prophet Muhammad as a political and religious genius without assigning him the term 'prophet'. Although these attempts by Jomier and Forward seem an honest Christian response to the question of Muhammad's status, they do not contribute to the understanding of Muhammad's religious and spiritual vision (Armstrong, 1992: 14). For many Western scholars, the concept of Prophethood should not include political and religious instruments in the reform of a nation which is in Islam. Though the artwork bears no resemblance to Muhammad, it reinforces long-held stereotypes of Muhammad as an intolerant conqueror. The Orientalist Thomas Arnold defuses in *The Preaching of Islam*, the use the legend that Islam was spread by the sword. He sets up his argument that Islam spread by means of peaceful preaching, free from any use of force. M.K. Gandhi says, "I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life.

It was rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet (Muhammad), the scrupulous regard for his pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every trouble" (*Young India*, September 23, 1924).

One of the widespread stereotypes about Prophet Muhammad is to view him as a virtuous man who bestowed his life to save his community, the pagans of the Arabian Peninsula, from their wretched lifestyle by claiming Prophet hood. This view, while appearing innocent at first glance, critically overlooks his lifetime achievements and his impact on the history of humanity. Watt comments that 'none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad' (Watt, 1953: 52). Islam will have a difficult time being seen in anything but an unfavorable light in the West. The presumed confrontation between Islam and the West, already revitalized by Huntington's "clash of civilizations" hypothesis, was thrown into full relief after the tragic and deplorable attacks on New York and Washington. The modern language of violence, militancy, terrorism, and fundamentalism, used disproportionately to construct a belligerent image of Islam as the 'other', goes back to the early medieval perceptions of Islam as the religion of the sword. Today fastest spreading religion in America is Islam. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks an estimated 20,000 Americans have embraced Islam. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and by 2025 it will be largest religion in the world, as one out of three will be a Muslim. Therefore, understanding Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would correct the wrong ideas and introduce the religion of Islam with its priceless values and attitudes to the non-Muslims.

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