The Inspiration behind Christianity and Islam
Western Religions
Ferris State University
Paula Sawyer
Abstract

Many People turn to Religion and its leaders for guidance in their lives. The guidance they receive however can be very different depending on the leader they chose to follow. This paper will compare two of the world’s largest religions and the men that inspired them.
The Inspiration behind Islam and Christianity

People look for a leader to give them a sense of purpose, and to help them find answers to questions like: why are we here and what is the meaning of all this? Religion and its leaders are often the first place we turn to find the answer to these burning questions. Islam and Christianity are two of the world’s largest religions, each of them founded by an influential leader that affected humanity in a powerful way. Through his life Jesus has inspired a religion that has grown to 1.8 billion believers today (Silas, 2012). Muhammad is considered by Islam to be the one true profit and has respectively 1.1 billion followers today (Silas, 2012). These two great men have inspired people throughout history and the numbers show they continue to influence our lives today. Though they both have great influence and some similarities can be seen between these leaders they set very different examples for their people to follow.

**The life of Christ**

Jesus was born in 6 B.C. in Bethlehem to a carpenter and his wife. Christians believe Mary his mother was approached by the angel Gabriel and asked to carry God’s son. Mary accepted and so the child they would call Messiah was born of a virgin in a stable. Though he started as a simple carpenter, by the age of thirty he began preaching to the public and performing miracles. He turned water into wine, walked on water, healed the sick and even brought his friend Lazarus back from the dead, a feat he would later do for himself. He referred to God as his father and spoke of him with a sense of authority like no one before him. A good example of this would be his sermon on the mount. Many crowds followed Jesus listening to his teachings and accepting him as the Messiah; however, he also made many enemies among the Jewish leaders. Jesus condemned
religious hypocrisy and spoke without regard to opposition. He made claims that either meant he was the son of God, a liar, or a madman which infuriated the Rabbis and Roman leaders. He was eventually betrayed by one of his own disciples and handed over to his enemies who crucified him. This was a fate Christians believe he knew was coming and accepted. Three days after his death his disciples proclaimed that he had risen from the dead. Christians believe that Jesus died for their sins so they would be able to enter into eternal life with him.

**Muhammad’s Life**

Muhammad, believed to be Islam’s true prophet, was born in 570 A.D., and was only six years old when he was orphaned by his parents. Raised by his uncle he joined a trading caravan as a merchant. At the age of forty he had a vision of the angel Gabriel, but it wasn’t until three years later when he had experienced several messages that he began to proclaim himself a prophet and share his revelations with others. During these revelations Muhammad would fall into a trance-like state and the angel Gabriel would appear to him in a human form and gave him the verses that would become the Qur’an (Oxtoby, 2002). The Qur’an came to the prophet over the course of twenty-two years and is considered by Muslims to be the final revelation for humanity by God (Oxtoby, 2002). For twelve years he recited and preached the words of the Qur’an and faith in the One God, Allah (Oxtoby, 2002). Because he was illiterate he dictated them to a group of men known as, “the scribes of revelation” (Oxtoby, 2002). However, when Muhammad met resistance amongst the Jews and Christians he took up the sword for the “Allah’s cause”. His militia drove Jews into exile, slavery, or simply executed them for rejecting what they considered to be radical ideas.
Similarities between the Prophets

There are some similarities we can see in these very different lives. Both men were able to inspire people leaving behind them two of the world’s largest religions, and they both were monotheistic in their beliefs, that there was one true God who was all powerful and all knowing. Both believed the Old Testament to be the word of God and Abraham to be the one God chose to start his chosen people. Neither of them recorded their own teachings, it was those that followed them that gave the written accounts we have today, the Qur’an being Muhammad’s account of his revelations to his scribes and the New Testament being eyewitness account of Jesus’ life and teachings. Though there are accounts of the lives of both men, their

That which makes them Different

Although there are several similarities between Jesus and Muhammad their differences are far greater. For starters Muhammad proclaimed himself to be a prophet, who had spoken with the angel Gabriel. It was through these visions or revelations that he developed his teachings. Jesus, however, proclaimed to be the son of God and in fact to be one with his father in heaven. He was both man and God, and accepted by his followers as such. Muhammad never claimed to be more than a man praying “O Allah! I am but a man.” (Ahmed, Musnad, vol 6, pg103). Being divine Jesus was sinless, but being just a man Muhammad was a sinner like the rest of us. Muhammad spoke with the angel Gabriel while Jesus claimed to receive his instructions from God (Slick, 2012). They taught very different methods of prayer as well. Jesus taught his disciples to pray from the heart in a simple manner and God will hear them (Silas, 2012). “Jesus taught that true prayer was the expression of the relationship and communication with the heavenly
father” (Silas, p.10, 2012). In his sermon on the mount Jesus told them to pray in private behind closed doors, “pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Van Voorst, p.105, 2007). He also gave his people the Our Father, and said “when you pray do not babbler repetitiously like the Gentiles because they think that by their many words they will be heard” (Van Voorst, p.105, 2007). Muhammad on the other hand had a more ritualistic style of prayer. Obligatory prayer must be performed five times in a day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark (Oxtoby, 2002). Before prayers ritual cleansing must be performed, and he told his followers that “if you don’t perform the bowing perfectly, your prayers are not accepted” (Silas, p.10, 2012). Jesus was said to fulfill nearly 300 Old Testament prophecies with 61 of them being specific in detail, but Muhammad did not (god resources, 2012). Jesus was a peaceful man spreading his message through his example and preaching to those that would listen. When approached by sinners he offered forgiveness, and showed them mercy. Muhammad on the other hand told his followers to “aggressively make war on non-Muslims” spreading Islam by force (Silas, p.6, 2012). For example he was responsible for the massacre of 800 Jewish male captives and ordered the execution of 10 people when he and his followers took Mecca (Silas, 2012).

Though some similarities can be found when comparing the lives of Jesus and Muhammad these two prophets were very different in their message and methods. Both men started with the belief in the Old Testament and in one God, but went on to lead very different lives and create two very different religions.
References


